I, Posthuman
embodying entangled subjectivities in gaming

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I, Posthuman: Embodying Entangled Subjectivities in Gaming

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Acknowledgements

I sort of fell into doing a PhD. Originally having been looking into MAs, I was advised that given my specific interests an MRes might be more suitable, and then a PhD was suggested. I found out I was eligible to apply five days before the deadline for proposals. From then to now, four years on, there are many people I have to thank.

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Declaration of Previous Publications

Some parts of this thesis have been previously published in:

Wilde, P. and Evans, A. (2017) 'Empathy at Play: Embodying Posthuman Subjectivities in Gaming'. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies.* [Online First] DOI: 10.1177/1354856517709987 [Wilde contribution = 50%]

A draft version of this publication is included in this thesis as appendix 1.

Wilde, P. (2015) 'The Empathic Gamer'. in *Encountering Empathy: Interrogating the Past, Envisioning the Future.* [ebook] ed. by Wain, V. and Pimomo, P. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 139-149.

A draft version of this publication is included in this thesis as appendix 2.

Extracts from these publications are primarily located in Chapter 6: Enacting Empathy, although other material occurs throughout the thesis.

Abstract:
I, Posthuman: Embodying Entangled Subjectivities in Gaming

We live in an era where the fundamental principles of what it means to be human are being reconsidered and reconceptualised, and we are moving towards a more entangled and relational understanding of the human's ontology. The "boundaries" of what constitute a human as separate from both its surroundings and human and non-human others are being problematised. How do you separate "the human" from its contexts? In an age where advanced technology often constitutes these contexts, how can you separate the human from technology? Whilst we have always been entangled, today this occurs in a context that is more technologically driven, and this has provoked further debate on the status of the "posthuman".

This PhD thesis is concerned with what it means and how feels to be posthuman, by exploring how posthuman subjectivities are enabled and embodied. What we are capable of doing emerges contextually: it is profoundly dependent on our environments. In my view of the posthuman, the stable "human" self is disrupted, giving way to a subjectivity where our interactions in the world are more intra-active. But how might we consider the emergence of posthuman subjectivities in more depth? I suggest using a particular example of posthuman subjectivity, the MMORPG avatar-gamer, to demonstrate how the humanistically separated entities of "avatar" and "gamer" can provide a context to explore how "other" and "self" are not ontologically distinct. In doing so, I ask: what specific practices enable or provoke this ontological entanglement? Engaging in an autoethnographic inquiry, I use my intra-action with my avatar Etyme in the MMORPG *World of Warcraft* as one example of posthuman subjectivity. This methodology in itself is intriguing to explore the multiplicity of selves we experience, and negotiates the humanistic overthrows of "selfhood" whilst experiencing the self as entangled.

Through my construct of the posthuman, where the human cannot be meaningfully separated from its environment, we are nevertheless still drawn to speak

of an “I” and have a desire to understand ourselves as independent agents. However, the fieldnotes analysed in this thesis disrupt the “I”, and instead reflect on the shifting sense of self with and through an entity that is experienced as both me-and-not-me. Whilst an autoethnographic posthumanism might seem contradictory, I argue that it is a fundamental step in acknowledging our humanistic tendencies and beginning to reflexively engage with, and critique, these ideals. To do so, this thesis “posthumanises” traditionally humanistic constructs: acting and empathy. To widen this concept further, a third analytic re-interrogates different aspects of subject formation to consider how these too could be “posthumanised”. This suggests a broader application of posthumanism, demonstrating how previous notions of mastery, autonomy, and individuality can be critiqued and destabilised in order to view our practices and “selves” as emergent and entwined.

Chapter 1: A Posthuman PhD

Introduction

I first started playing videogames clustered around a PC with my family when I was around five or six years old. My parents, my brother, and I undertook fascinating adventures, from *Castle of the Winds* to *Little Big Adventure*, from *Myst* to *Riven*, from *DragonLore* to *Discworld*. I remember those times with acute fondness, even for the frustrating parts; the sound of the character Rincewind saying "that doesn't work" for the 5000th time is one I am sure many players are haunted by, not just the Wilde family. Despite my early engagement with videogames, I never quite imagined that I would be using this medium as a context to explore the human condition or to conceptualise the posthuman. Yet, this thesis is precisely that – an exploration of posthuman subjectivity through gameplay.

This thesis works on the basis that we are posthuman – but that we do not yet know what that means, how posthuman subjectivity is emergent, or how our humanist practices might be rethought in order to align with more posthuman perspectives. In the following chapter I outline some of the main arguments that have driven my exploration of these issues, and give an overview of the context of gaming, before providing a breakdown of the thesis and the aims of each chapter.

The posthuman

Talking about the post-digital context, Kwastek (2015: 79) explains that 'we apply the prefix 'post' to question some established concept which we might have all too easily taken for granted'. This to me sums up the importance of the posthuman – to question the taken for granted concept of the human and to critically re-engage with what that term means. We cannot claim that what it means to be "human" has been a stable category. Historically, different rights have been extended to different subjects, different behaviours have been deemed "normal", and we have conceived of different ways to understand the world. The term "human" then, does not seem adequate to encompass all of the shifting attitudes and agendas that have been housed by that term. It is evident

that our understanding of our "selves" and our interaction with the world around us, the "subjects" and "objects" within it, is evolving. The "posthuman" can be and has been used as both a philosophical vessel through which to explore this shift, as well as being used as a title.

In this thesis I draw mainly on Braidotti's (2013) genealogy of posthumanism and her vision for a posthuman subject and posthuman ethics; on Barad's (2007) notions of entanglement and intra-action to explore the ways in which we are not ontologically distinct subjects (as the concept of "inter"action might suggest) but are bound up in our relations to everything around us; and on Hayles' (1999) version of the posthuman as a material-informational entity. In our current, media saturated climate, we are often exposed to "moral panic" stories that suggest our increasing intimacy with machines is irrevocably changing our behaviours (for the worse). However, posthumanism is a philosophy that points out that many of these "changes" are not actual changes in our nature, but a change in our understanding of what the ontology of the human is. Humans have always been reliant on other technologies and tools – from wearing clothes to building houses we have always been augmented and shaped by our surroundings. Yet, in the traditional concept of the liberal human subject, which has dominated our philosophical view of self for some time, there is an understanding of the human as an autonomous being. The liberal human subject aimed to perpetuate a unified sense of self and of control, but our increasing intimacy with technology appeared to be a dramatic and new "challenge" to that. However, the unity of the human was never complete, and posthumanism is a philosophy that shows how our relationship with technologies, tools, and "others" reveals the fallacy of assuming the skin is the boundary of the human. As Blackman (2012: 77) claims 'we are not singular and bounded, but rather permeable and open to being affected and affecting' through circumstances, environments, and feelings beyond what is housed within the body.

McLuhan (1994 [1964]) demonstrated the ways in which different media were an "extension" of a pre-existing human capability: clothing becomes an extension of the skin, keeping us warm; wheeled vehicles are an extension of the feet, allowing us to travel. However, posthumanism disrupts this subject-centred view, and instead argues that more than *extended*, we are instead *entangled* with our media and technologies – as well as with our environments and with human and non-human "others". From this

perspective, '[h]umans do not simply manipulate or control machines, data, and networks any more than machines, data, and networks simply manipulate or control us' (Paasonen et al. 2015: 2). Rather than considering the McLuhan-based model of a central "subject" extending their human capabilities outwards and utilising media in a hierarchical understanding of anthropocentrism, a posthuman model disrupts and displaces this centrality, and understands the human as just another part of the entanglement. As Kember and Zylinska (2012: 13, original emphasis) explain:

> [i]t is not simply the case that "we" – that is, autonomously existing humans – live in a complex technological environment that we can manage, control, and use. Rather, we are – physically and hence ontologically – part of that technological environment, and it makes no more sense to talk of *us* using *it*, than it does of *it* using *us*.

Hayles (1999: 6) claims that 'people become posthuman because they think they are posthuman'. If that is the case, I am irrevocably posthuman. I agree with the sentiment of the posthuman condition: that to conceive of ourselves as the stable, fixed, anthropocentric liberal human subject seems inherently flawed when we consider our deep entanglements in the world around us. The process of conducting this PhD has enhanced and asserted that feeling and this thesis goes on to explore the emergence of a particular posthuman subjectivity. However, what does it mean to be posthuman in a world as deeply rooted in humanism as ours?

Posthuman subjectivity suggests a condition of emergence, intra-acting with other entities and understanding our subjectivity and our actions as contingent and entirely dependent on what is around us. Where "interaction" suggests two distinct entities engaging with one another, Barad's (2007) notion of intra-action serves as a revision of this to account for the ways in which we emerge only from those engagements, and therefore disrupts a subject/object binary (I explore this term further throughout the thesis). However, our societies still revolve around "ideals" of liberalism (even in its "neo" form), capitalism, and meritocracy, including an emphasis on individualism. We are given the impression that we should view the self as a project,

and that we should undertake the personal responsibility to monitor and regulate the self. This "self-knowledge" is then used as a form of governance, but in a way that still implies we can control and master ourselves. To some extent, our technologies are now becoming more implicit in this self-monitoring, through the use of biosensing technologies, and the quantification of self. Even when dependent on technology to monitor our blood sugar levels or keep our heart beating in the right rhythm, we maintain the myth of agency and control. We rely on our computers to house our memories (telephone numbers, photographs, notes); yet we install apps for "brain training" to exercise the mind and work on our recall. These examples of our reliance on technologies demonstrate our entanglement with them, yet there is a tension between this reliance on an "other" and the desire to see the self as individual, and as a project we can work on for self-betterment. As entangled as we are, we are embedded in societies that seek to individualise. If we are individual, and individually responsible, we are easier to control, as we can each be held accountable to manage our "selves". We are often happy to conform to this standard – we are, to say the least, ambivalent about the notion of "giving up" control – as if it was ever "ours" in the first place. We thrive on our ability to monitor and control ourselves. We adopt anthropocentric attitudes that see humans as the centre of the universe. Earth, animals and machines are there to do our bidding[1]. And why would we want to give this up? This comfortable position of being able to congratulate ourselves for our autonomous achievements and to have subordinate "objects" is a luxury. In this society then, perhaps the claim that 'people become posthuman because they think they are posthuman' (Hayles 1999: 6) is oversimplified. We are all entwined, but how do we really think of ourselves as such? Is thinking of ourselves as posthuman enough? What are the actions of a posthuman? How do we embrace our entanglements?

My own understanding of the posthuman subject is one that is very much embodied. Exploring subjectivity is a complex task, and this becomes even more fraught when you are also claiming that subjectivity is not individually "owned", but is dependent on all the entanglements that come together to give subjectivity that distinct sense of being "you". However, in order to research how posthuman subjectivity

[1] The emergence of many dystopian depictions of our future when the world around us reasserts its independence from human will demonstrates our deep-seated fear of such a loss of control.

emerges, and how we can rethink our everyday actions as "being posthuman", it seemed advisable to choose a specific context. We are, I believe, always posthuman. We are never singular selves, separate from our surroundings: our need to eat, drink and breathe is already testament to that as things "external" to the self are perpetually being "internalised" for our survival. But, for the purposes of this PhD project, I have embraced one particular entanglement of my posthuman subjectivity. I have actively sought entanglement in a digital, online, technological context in order to situate my claims within a very specific relationship between "self" and "other". This posthuman subjectivity then becomes the focus of my research, the framework through which I explore our intra-dependence on "others". The example of the avatar-gamer has allowed an explicit way to account for what it means to be posthuman, how it feels, and how posthuman subjectivity emerges through specific entanglements. The avatar-gamer posthuman subjectivity is used to ground the exploration of my own posthumanity. As a case study, the principals I explore in that entanglement can then be applied elsewhere.

In this thesis, I explore 'subjectivities that are made possible by digital technologies' (Ferreday 2009: 3) but by claiming these as posthuman I am able to broaden the scope of the project by demonstrating how the same practices, affects and attachments that facilitate this subjectivity are also as prevalent and apparent offline as they are online. Thus, the application of posthumanism means insights based on digital subjectivities can be applied in other contexts e.g. performance, empathy, memory, and the desire to develop and achieve. In bridging these two positions between technological and non-technological posthumanism, what I propose is that the distributed subjectivity of the avatar-gamer is one that arises from what could be historically considered to be very human "essences" or ways of interacting with the world, people and objects around us. This project therefore extends the claim that 'subjectivity is emergent rather than given, distributed rather than located solely in consciousness, emerging from and integrated into a chaotic world rather than occupying a position of mastery and control removed from it' (Hayles 1999: 291). To develop earlier accounts of posthuman subjectivity, this thesis actively explores *how* subjectivity is emergent, distributed, and integrated.

Whilst I therefore agree with claims that 'we were always posthuman' (Tufekci 2012: 34), this example of posthuman subjectivity also takes up recent calls to explore

the 'affective attachment to the everyday technologies of the internet' (Ferreday 2009: 2) and how these online activities are raising questions of subjectivity[2].

What is in a game?

Although the primary focus of this thesis is to explore posthuman subjectivity, the use of gaming as a context means that the research will also contribute to the field of game studies. I have no doubt that posthumanism is a philosophy that helps to make sense of the world through its conception of our ability to affect and be affected, to emerge from our intra-actions with environments, surroundings, people and technologies, and to disrupt problematic worldviews of anthropocentrism and some of the undesirable aspects of humanism. However, my concern with posthumanism and the posthumanities is that their potential is often limited to an audience of academics, theorists, and philosophers, rather than their application in everyday activities. I aim to address this gap by identifying the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) avatar-gamer as an example of an everyday posthuman subjectivity, and to demonstrate the posthumanising of commonplace practices and affects. This application of theory in "real world" (albeit specifically privileged) scenarios makes theory relevant and *useful*.

The capacity of videogames has expanded in the last half a century to create new interactive worlds for us to explore, work, and play in. Originally, digital games were limited as to what the gamer could do – there was little choice, and so player experience only varied in relation to in how many points were gained and how far the gamer progressed (Garrelts 2005: 2-3). However, through the development of the medium, more recent digital games have expansive spaces and more ways to interact, so that each player experience can be more individual and the played game is different depending on who plays it and how (Garrelts 2005: 3). Using a videogame for an exploration of an entangled posthuman subject has been useful as it represents one way in which "self" and "other" are entwined – as Garrelts (2005: 16) claimed, research on digital games 'cannot focus on the game, or the gamer; it must focus on the intersection and negotiation between the two – any other focus and the object of study dissolves'.

[2] Whilst Ferreday (2009: 2) uses the "everyday" to define and justify her exploration of text-based websites, I would argue that online gaming is also an increasingly everyday activity.

As I will explore in the following chapters of this thesis, games can be studied in a variety of ways that challenge the binary between "real" and "virtual" worlds. For example, scholars have considered the ways in which the prevalence of technological games have affected our attitudes in other ways by exploring the phenomenon of "gamification" – an example of how games as a medium have shaped human association and action. The "gamification" model has seen businesses attempt to harness the incentives provided by gaming, employing gamification techniques in an effort to enthuse their workforce (see, for example, McGonigal 2012; Burke 2014).

Gaming is, to many, such an everyday and ordinary habit that it is one that goes unquestioned and unconsidered. According to the UK Interactive Entertainment website (2017) some estimates of UK player demographics suggest that in 2016 there were '18million people aged between 6 and 64 playing games in the UK, or 38% of the population in that age group […] Across all UK 6-64 year olds, […] 21% (10.2million) [played] online games'. However, despite this, as Hitchens et al. (2012: 2) state, 'the nature of the interaction between player and player character, and the effects upon it, are far from fully understood'. My research makes a contribution to filling this gap in the knowledge, and offers posthumanism as a way of theorising the avatar-gamer collaboration. It does so by exploring the ways in which posthumanist theory can apply to gaming, in order to suggest a new way in which we can understand subjectivity and how it is shaped through our engagement with "external" stimuli.

MMORPGs offer an intriguing site for research and my own research takes place in one of the oldest, *World of Warcraft*[3] *(WoW)*, which launched in 2004. The game is open to an international audience to sign up and explore a 3-dimensional world by creating an avatar from a range of races and professions. *World of Warcraft* continues to expand as a gameworld, with new areas, expansions, and characters being added to the game. The *World of Warcraft* franchise is also developing, and 2016 saw the release of a blockbuster film, *Warcraft*, based on the game.

MMORPGs are worlds in which players can explore vast landscapes with their customised, humanoid avatar. Thousands of players can simultaneously play the game online, and encounter each other within the gameworld. *World of Warcraft* has its own

[3] Produced by Blizzard Entertainment.

histories and geographies, and two opposing factions (Alliance and Horde) battle through a variety of regions. The *World of Warcraft* avatar is viewed from a third-person perspective and traverses a 3-dimensional landscape to undertake "quests" given by NPCs (non-player characters), which lead to rewards in experience points, money and items. Different aspects within the world can be interacted with, for example: in order to fight monsters; converse with NPC tradespeople; gain new skills; and to communicate with other players to chat, share quests, and form guilds. As experience points mount up, the avatar-gamer progresses through different levels, opening up new abilities and areas. Characters are created by choosing from 13 different races (ranging from gnome to undead), with each having their own history and background within the world, as well as their own customisable aesthetic. Choosing a "class" (12 options, from monk to mage) denotes your role and primary playing style within the game (see World of Warcraft 2017a and 2017b for full details of races and classes in the game).

Player experiences even of the same game can, therefore, differ greatly and the avatar in the gameworld is a figure that can be analysed in a variety of ways. The blurring between avatar and gamer has been explored extensively (e.g. Banks and Bowman 2016; Gee 2008; Filiciak 2003; Sundén 2012) and player experiences vary between seeing the avatar as a "tool" for navigation (Collins 2011); as "characters" to empathise with (Belman and Flanagan 2010); as an "ideal self" (Jin 2011); or as a "representation" of the gamer's identity in the gameworld (Filiciak 2003: 97; Cerra and James 2012: 168). However, many of these analyses are grounded much more in a traditional humanist approach. Viewing the avatar as a tool, for example, implies a hierarchy wherein the avatar is an object both separate from and subservient to the player. Whilst viewing the avatar as a character could be argued to be somewhat more post-anthropocentric in recognising the avatar has certain qualities, it nevertheless imposes a self/other dichotomy.

Conversely, the application of the posthuman alters how we view this relationship and the subjectivities that are formed. Rather than understanding the human as fixed, bounded and stable, in a position of mastery over the game, instead I view the intra-acting elements of avatar-gamer as non-hierarchically entwined. This post-anthropocentric understanding acknowledges and embraces the inseparability of notions of self, other and environment.

Introducing the chapters

In the following chapter, Proposing the Posthuman Gamer, I expand on the application of posthuman theory to the game environment. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer a full genealogy of posthumanism, I draw on some of the central themes of the philosophy, explaining their importance and relevance, before applying these to the avatar-gamer. This chapter sets out the context for the research in more depth.

Having claimed the MMORPG gamer as posthuman, Chapter 3: Embracing Methodological Contradictions then discusses the ways in which I explore this subjectivity within my thesis. Drawing on autoethnography for a posthuman project could be seen as problematic to the research context. Writing about the *self* and *my* experiences might be considered contradictory given the posthuman acknowledgement that the notion of self as singular is a flawed conception, and the proposal that we should be turning away from anthropocentrism. However, I read the "I" of the autoethnography through the lens of posthumanism – accepting that this "I" is made up of a multitude of different components and that the self is 'always relational, always defined by its interconnections with others' (Blackman 2008: 117). The "I" I employ destabilises anthropocentrism by its affordance of equal emphasis on the avatar as a part of the posthuman subjectivity.

Chapter 4: Themes, Positions and Disclaimers introduces the key analytical devices used to make sense of posthuman subjectivity in this thesis: acting, empathy, and subject formation. I have mentioned that despite our reliance on our environments, technologies, and the "others" around us, we still attempt to understand the self as individual and autonomous, master over our own environment. Throughout this thesis, beyond the context of the gamer as posthuman, I explore different actions, affects, and understandings of self to demonstrate how this is not the case. Through the analytics of acting, empathy, and subject formation experienced in-game, I show how these potentially humanistic understandings of self are actually inherently bound to the "others" around us.

Chapter 4 also provides some caveats. I explain my scepticism towards the concept of "immersion", and my desire to demonstrate that being posthuman and

playing a game are complex experiences, irreducible to only the "good parts". I also make it clear in this chapter that whilst the construction of this thesis suggests a neat, linear narrative, this has not been the case. My experiences in-game have all been intertwined, and the structure of this thesis is therefore an imposed practice of sense-making, rather than an "accurate" portrayal of a chronological encounter with different affects.

The following chapters then do the interpretative work of putting these analytics into effect. Chapter 5: From Acting to Intra-Acting is the first theme, and considers the ways in which acting theories that are based in a humanistic historical moment can be drawn upon to demonstrate the intra-dependence between self and other. Analysing gaming experiences through acting theory sheds a particular light on the avatar-gamer subjectivity, and offers an opportunity to take forward certain practices from acting into our understanding of subjectivity. In acting, the relationship between actor and character could be theorised as one of mastery and control, but I "posthumanise" these theories by drawing on the more entangled aspects that demonstrate the reliance of each entity on one another.

In broadening these ideas out from a particular profession, Chapter 6: Enacting Empathy considers how the intra-action between "self" and "other" is also apparent in the "human" ability to empathise. I draw on moments in-game of the avatar-gamer experience and read these as an empathic intra-connection. By demonstrating the cognitive-affective connection between the avatar and the gamer I consider how these moments demonstrate a further destabilising of the notion of us as ontologically separate units. However, this analysis is problematic for certain conceptions of empathy, which impose a strict self/other dichotomy. I therefore propose a version of posthuman empathy, which allows us to view empathy as an entanglement between entities, where each is affected by the "other".

The final theme again extends the scope of the research project by moving into wider aspects of subject formation, and considering these in a posthuman light. In Chapter 7: Emergent Subject Positions, I study the humanistic practices of making sense of the self that occur online. Even in the context of an MMORPG, in a research project that specifically seeks to explore being posthuman, I am plagued by the desire to see the

self as singular, and to make sense of my experiences in linear ways that conform to certain expectations of the good citizen. In this chapter, I therefore problematise those experiences, and consider what it would mean to view our approaches to achievement, attention, memory, and development in a posthuman way.

Chapter 8: A Contingent Conclusion draws together the main arguments of this thesis. In this chapter I make clear my proposal that we can make sense of posthuman subjectivity by posthumanising (in this case meant to both extend and to equalise) the conceptualisation of the actions that we take. In doing so I extend my use of posthumanism to not only think beyond the "human" as an ontological unit but also to think about how our everyday actions and understandings of self can be considered in a posthuman way. I "posthumanise" concepts throughout the thesis by reading them through the lens of posthumanism, problematising their anthropocentrism and offering insight on their entanglement. The conclusion therefore demonstrates how my research is made accessible outside of the context of gaming, thus proving the ways in which we are all posthuman and demonstrating *how* subjectivity is emergent, distributed, and integrated.

Conclusion

This thesis addresses a gap in current literature surrounding posthumanism and posthuman subjectivities by taking a specific example of a posthuman subjectivity, and exploring it in more depth. I critically examine how our relationship with a non-human technological other is felt, what characterises that subjectivity and how we might, therefore, begin to analyse this subject formation in order to make sense of it. As I repeatedly state throughout this thesis – being "posthuman" *feels* very "human". The way we are able to affect and be affected by others and environments around us shows us to be the entangled beings posthumanism suggests. What we need to do now is to critically re-examine the way that we *think* and conceptualise our being.

Chapter 2: Proposing the Posthuman Gamer

Introduction

In the following chapter I provide an account of "the posthuman" that I engage with throughout this thesis in order to offer a brief overview for the reader and to situate this project within a broader framework. I first consider both utopian and dystopian accounts of our relationships with technology. Given the wide ranging literature in this area, I have paid particular attention to a few key texts I feel are representative of the main arguments. I explore the limitations in these binary approaches to new technologies, and consider this as the context in which the term "the posthuman" has emerged to provide an alternative account. I then outline the concepts of posthumanism that have been taken up in my research. These include: the critique of the liberal subject; the decentering of the human to unfix it from the centre of our worldview; the inclusion of "other", non-human entities into our concept of subjectivity; and the multifaceted relationships that we have with these non-human others. Through these concepts I then consider how this might shape the notion of the "posthuman gamer" that this thesis aims to interrogate.

Against utopian/dystopian dichotomies

In the current age of a Western society saturated with "new" media and teased by the tantalising promise or threat of what that might become, there have arisen a variety of positions on what our technologically mediated selves and relationships may or may not achieve. There has been much debate from several different camps on what this increased connection and intimacy with our technology means, and how (or, indeed, whether) it can be seen as an indication of the changes to our humanity that we will face as technology becomes even more advanced. For example, in *The Emotion Machine* (2007) Minksy argues for an understanding of how we think that demonstrates "reason" and "emotion" as the different ways of thinking that can be broken down into a process. In doing so, he suggests that we can build artificially intelligent machines to "assist" with our thinking, and become as "thoughtful" as we are (Minksy 2007). Elsewhere, Kurzweil (2000: 256) sees a future that holds a 'complete merger of the species with the

technology it originally created' – computers integrated into brains and bodies – whilst Joy (2000: n.p.n.) argues against this "utopian" vision to raise concerns that advances in technology and weapons of mass destruction mean that 'it is no exaggeration to say we are on the cusp of the further perfection of extreme evil'. Caricatured in these ways as either utopian, allowing us to overcome, for example, categories of age, gender, class, race (e.g. Plant 1997; Haraway 1991), or dystopian, where the cyborg-self becomes inhuman and emptied of feeling (e.g. Turkle 2011), these differing views each make interesting and potentially productive arguments. However, as I explore below, for the most part they each fall foul of making sweeping statements and reducing the experience to either one or the other on a binary of dystopian or utopian sentiment.

There are concerns from many that our increasing intimacy with machines is a thoroughly negative turn that equals a lack of intimacy with other humans, and I review some of the most popular accounts below. Theorists in this area critically engage with our technological relationships. Turkle (2011) asks, for example: is sleeping with our phones next to us, checking them before we go to sleep and as soon as we wake up, distancing us from the human who we might be sleeping next to? Are communicative devices actually becoming barriers to our "real" and intimate communications face-to-face? As we program robots to care for the elderly, are we disregarding our responsibility to future generations?

Turkle is a well-known example of someone previously a technological optimist, now turned sceptic. In her first book, *The Second Self*, Turkle (2011: xi) 'focused on how evocative computers fostered new reflection about the self'. It is, according to Turkle (2011: xi) herself, a book 'full of hope and optimism'. But in the decade that followed she began to be troubled by stories of those people who, rather than seeing computers as an intermediary, preferred their online existence to that of "real life". In Turkle's (2011) latest book, *Alone Together*, she considers how our insecurities in "real life" relationships have culminated in, according to her research, us turning to technology in order to be both connected but also *protected* from the fallibility of humanity, the risks and disappointments associated with those connections.

Parts of Turkle's (2011) studies consider the role of robots and our ability to imbue them with such importance. She explains that when we enter into relationships

with objects that then thrive under our care we connect with them in ways that experience those objects as intelligent (Turkle 2011: 24). She believes that it is our desire to 'fill in the blanks' (Turkle 2011: 24) of what those objects or technologies are capable of; willingly giving the machine human qualities and projecting traits that allow us to connect with technology. From Turkle's (2011) perspective, we *want* to anthropomorphise. Sharing our emotions with, for example, a robot allows us to feel intimacy and empathy for the "other". Rather than seeing this as an extension or development of emotion and connection though, Turkle's (2011: xii) concern with such relationships is that 'we expect more from technology and less from each other'. She argues that we enter into these relationships with our technologies, we imbue them with more intimate human traits as we begin to become less intimate with our fellow human being (Turkle 2011). Whilst others might argue that technologies have brought us closer together by conflating the distances of both space and time (see, for example, Ferreday 2009), for Turkle (2011) these technologically mediated relationships, even when with fellow humans, are not of the same quality or richness that face-to-face interactions can bring.

According to Turkle (2011: xiv) 'we seem determined to give human qualities to objects and content to treat each other as things'. Turkle's (2011) research is thorough and is based in extensive qualitative research, but it also speaks to a societal fear of technology – particularly targeting parents and the dangers their children face online. This form of media / moral panic could be considered cultural generationalism – 'a set of discursive formations in the West that denounces the practices, behaviours, concerns, ideas and pastimes of youth and children while nostalgically venerating those of the recent past' (Cover 2006: n.p.n.). Cover (2006) writes that there is a cultural apprehension for technologies that are not only viewed as dangerous through their "new-ness" but through their links to virtuality. The "virtual" promise is likened to the escape from the "real" that taking drugs can provide (Cover 2006). This, as Cover (2006: n.p.n.) argues, creates a problematic comparison of addiction, and offers a reductionist understanding that fails to account for the 'complex matrix of desire, identity and sociality that produces the choice to spend significant time engaged in game activity'. Whilst some fears for children's safety online are not unfounded, on the other end of the spectrum there are certain more positive views of our connection and

collaboration with the non-human "other".

For some, the loss of humanity as "centre" of our worldview is a positive turn towards de- or post- anthropocentrism that allows us to rewrite certain understandings of "the human". For example, early cyberfeminist accounts of the internet enthusiastically embraced new technology and suggested that cyber culture permitted freedom from constructs of class, race, gender and sexuality. In 'A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century' (1991), for example, the VNS Matrix hailed their activism as the 'virus of the new world disorder', and urged people to disrupt and queer gender binaries through new technologies. Others saw the new technologies of the late-twentieth century as a chance to rewrite politics. For these researchers, new methods of communication meant a new form of democracy were needed which could produce radical, transparent and participatory politics (Kellner n.d.). Kellner (n.d.) suggests that a democratisation of politics requires 'relentless criticism of the existing media system' but could happen both within mainstream media and through alternative, 'oppositional media' outside of the mainstream. In the technopolitics suggested by Kellner, new forms of cyberdemocracy are facilitated through our access to and use of the internet as a platform for the creation of new public spheres. Indeed, the hope of new political structures continues today, and remains attractive, as evidenced by Castells (2012), who has analysed the emergence of social movements in online spaces, becoming one of the world's most cited communications scholars.

Another consideration of utopian accounts has been the promise that advanced technology might bring to new relationships between humans and non-humans. Robots are increasingly being designed as caregivers either to the young or the elderly. Potential positive outcomes include providing more independence for the elderly, keeping them out of care-homes for longer (Sharkey and Sharkey 2012) or providing a 'therapeutic playmate' for children with autism (Dautenhahn 2003)[4]. However, even in these positive scenarios, issues of robot ethics and robot rights then come to light, especially when these machines become intelligent and (seemingly) emotive themselves. Whilst Sparrow (2012) questions whether robots of the future that display human-like intelligence will be allowed to be turned off or destroyed; Verugglo and

[4] There are also dystopian accounts within this ideal, for example Channel 4's television programme *Humans* explores the fictional "synth" (synthetic) caregiver as a controlling jailer.

Abney (2012: 348) ask, '[a]s robots increase in autonomy and complexity, and their use becomes ever more pervasive in society, will the robotic programmer, builder, user, or the robot itself be the proper locus of moral evaluation and legal responsibility?'. Questions circulate as to whether we have a responsibility to care for the machines we make, and Fuller (2015) states: 'not to give automated machines some measure of respect, if not rights, is tantamount to disowning one's children – "mind children", as the visionary roboticist Hans Moravec called them a quarter-century ago'. Elsewhere there are discussions as to our ethical obligation in the creation of intelligent machines, and how we can offer these machines a worthwhile life, with possibilities for compassion, growth, and understanding (Hughes 2012: 75).

However, instead of viewing our relationship with and use of technology in dystopian terms that suggest we are losing our connections with each other, or utopian terms that consider us as 'parents of machine children' (Hughes 2012: 74) – children that can provide companionship and support – I suggest we instead need to take up Braidotti's (2013: 90) call 'for resistance to both the fatal attraction of nostalgia and the fantasy of transhumanist and other techno-utopias' and consider the *posthuman* view of our connections and relationships with technology.

Despite their opposing arguments, both Turkle and Moravec's claims are implicitly humanist. Both consider technology to operate from outside of the human, as an "other". In a posthumanist view, our relationships with technologies are instead what define us. We are constantly entangled with technologies, animals, humans, and environments to the point where exactly what compromises the "human" is in fact made up of a multiplicity of component parts and selves, as I explore below. As such, technology cannot be a "threat" to "humanity" – it is what makes us "human" in the first place.

Posthumanism therefore accepts the fact that we are entangled beings, formed by the other entities that create our entanglements. In this view, '[d]igital technologies are part of this world and of our worldview; they are part of what shapes us materially and ontologically as embodied subjects' (Shinkle 2005: 30). This can operate on two levels. Firstly, such an argument displaces the idea that our "interactions" online are inferior forms of communication. However, in accepting our *intra*-action with certain

digital technologies we are also able to consider intra-action with non-digital "others", be they technologies, environments, animals, or "others" from our own species. The posthuman therefore both encompasses our connection with technology, our entangled selves, and a post-anthropocentric view of those relationships. I consider what this posthuman view of the subject might mean below.

Complicating the posthuman

Posthumanism is a term that can mean many different things to many different people in a variety of contexts. As Wolfe (2010: xii) states, 'the term has begun to emerge with different and sometimes competing meanings' and Roden (2015: 20) agrees, saying that posthumanism 'comes in different flavours'. Herbrechter (2013: 41) supports a complicated concept of the posthuman when he suggests that:

> a new paradigm of thought has been emerging which is characterized by its opposition to and its transcendence of humanism. This paradigm, Franklin writes, opposes the separation between human and nonhuman environments and, instead, emphasizes the complexity and interrelatedness of human and nonhuman forms of agency.

Herbrechter's (2013) account suggests an oppositional paradigm, but one that holds a few key principles. Some of the main arguments of posthumanism are its acknowledgement of permeability, and the rejection of both anthropocentrism and the idea that the human is a bounded, fixed, stable self.

From this viewpoint, Haraway (1991: 178) pointedly asks '[w]hy should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin', when subjectivity is defined so much by experiences that happen beyond the body. How we understand our bodies has shaped how we understand our "selves" and the body and

subjectivity therefore become intertwined to the degree that there is no difference[5]. Pepperell (2003) erodes the perceived boundary between mind and body by drawing on a range of contemporary ideas from sensory deprivation to quantum reality. He demonstrates the ways in which our bodies are conscious through the ways in which apparently "mental" states are often most easily recognised through our "physical" attributes (Pepperell 2003). Accordingly, he suggests that 'we might be gradually drawn to the conclusion that our minds, our bodies and the world are continuous' (Pepperell 2003: 20). Posthuman subjectivity is therefore not a refusal of the flesh: rather than *transcending* the body we instead *extend* our embodied awareness (Braidotti 2013; Hayles 1999). In opposition to accounts of posthuman subjectivity as anti- or dehumanising, we might instead posit a subjectivity whereby 'we are no less human than the first time an ancestor picked up a stick to extend an arm' (Tufekci 2012: 34). This links to the idea of the originary prosthesis or originary technicity suggested by Derrida or Stiegler and their successors (Frabetti 2011). In this work the "instrumentality" of technology is disavowed in favour of technology as formative – 'the human co-emerges with tool use […] Stiegler maintains that human beings can experience themselves *only through* technology' (Frabetti 2011: 6 and 7, my emphasis). Taking into account the further studies into affect, embodiment, and permeability, not to mention the different subjectivities that we inhabit, the idea of the "rational" and autonomous being becomes problematic (explored below in more detail), and hence a posthuman model that accommodates a more fluid understanding of "being" can be usefully employed (Wilde and Evans 2017: 4). The singular subject is replaced by the view of subjectivity as a flow and a fold, where our materialities are shaped by others in our environment, who may be both human and non-human (Wilde and Evans 2017: 4).

The idea of opposing the separation between humans and "others", and the complexities that follow have various far reaching consequences in a multitude of fields. For Hayles (1999: 290-291), the posthuman model understands that 'human functionality expands because the parameters of the cognitive system it inhabits expand'. This form of posthumanism looks to how our "extensions" and expansions

[5] 'If we can accept that thought may be distributed throughout the body (and the body distributed through the environment) then we must assume that any factor that affects the body might have a bearing on thought' (Pepperell 2003: 25).

have wider implications for our agencies beyond a single human body, and instead considers differently enacting and intra-acting bodies as producing different modes and ways of being. In my thesis I apply posthumanism to *World of Warcraft*, a MMORPG gaming environment, and the site of my autoethnographic study. It is my argument that the MMORPG gamer represents an embodiment of a posthuman subjectivity.

However, before I focus on this it is important to reiterate that in my use of posthumanism I do not only view the posthuman as one who is technologically mediated. As Tufekci (2012: 34) argues 'we were always posthuman', that is to say we have always reached beyond the boundaries of our own skin, have always formed relationships with human and non-human others. The posthuman view acknowledges and embraces the ontological inseparability of components of "self", "other" and "environment". This therefore forces 'a displacement of the lines of demarcation between structural differences, or ontological categories, for instance between the organic and the inorganic, the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous systems' (Braidotti 2013: 89). Posthumanism could be considered as a multifaceted philosophical tool or theory wherein we are able to reconfigure and reconsider various implications from past conclusions.

There are, arguably, three main themes to a concept of "the posthuman", which I take to be a questioning of: the liberal human subject; the idea of a fixed, bounded, stable self; and anthropocentrism. The account presented in this thesis is specifically for the purpose of positioning the reader, in a thesis that uses the posthuman as the basis of the theoretical perspective in the work, rather than a fully detailed genealogy (for more exhaustive works see *How We Became Posthuman* by Hayles (1999), *The Posthuman* by Braidotti (2013), *What is Posthumanism?* by Wolfe (2010), *Posthumanism: A Critical Introduction* by Herbrechter (2013) to name but a few). However, below I will very briefly cover some of the main arguments of posthumanism, in order to contextualise and place my own understanding of the term. I draw on a variety of ideas and negotiate my own position in relation to these.

The liberal human subject

Whilst relationships with technology form part of the rationale for the posthuman turn,

they are far from the only instigating factor and posthumanism has a complex and multifaceted basis informed by the critique of what or who the "human" is. As Whitehead and Wesch (2012: 4) state 'the notion of the "human" is always a contingent category' and different versions of what counts as a "human" have been constructed and conceived during our history in order to justify the whims of those in power.

The rejection of the "liberal human subject" therefore stems from the idea that what actually counts as "human" is already flawed if you consider that, historically, only a particular kind of human has had full access to rights. The liberal human subject has traditionally applied to a white, male, heterosexual, Western, fully abled human, where other parts of society have been excluded even the most basic rights. It is only in the last century and a half that we have seen slavery abolished; women granted the right to vote and own their own property; the Disability Discrimination Act passed; and the recognition of LGBTQ+ rights. Women, ethnic minorities, disabled people, or anyone belonging to LGBTQ+ communities have historically been treated as lesser subjects, without access to the rights and benefits of others. Given that these rights have only previously extended to a specific minority Braidotti (2013: 1) writes that:

> [n]ot all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. [...] Not if by "human" we mean that creature familiar to us from the Enlightenment and its legacy: "The Cartesian subject of the cogito, the Kantian "community of reasonable beings", or, in more sociological terms, the subject as citizen, rights-holder, property-owner, and so on" (Wolfe 2010a).

Furthermore, the idea of the "ideal" human subject attracted a great deal of critique from post-structuralists who began to question individualism as a social and cultural construction rather than an intrinsic quality of the "perfect" or ideal human subject (Burr 1995). Whilst posthumanism has some chronological overlap with post-structuralism it differs in some important ways (dependent on different readings and definitions). According to Braidotti (2013: 188), '[t]he posthuman subject is not postmodern, because it does not rely on any anti-foundationalist premises. Nor is it

poststructuralist, because it does not function within the linguistic turn or other forms of deconstruction'. She states that the ideas of signification and representation that frame post-structuralist thought do not apply to the materialist and vitalist posthuman subject (Braidotti 2013: 188). Rather than ascribing to 'the primacy of culture and of signification over subject formation' (Braidotti 2013: 188), a vital politics instead understands these factors as contingent within a particular historical moment, in need of updating to reflect the non-unitary status of the subject.

From this perspective, whilst humanists believe in autonomy, responsibility and self-determination this amounts to an idea that 'the human being is not the plaything of forces from which he cannot hope to escape […] the humanists think that the individual can achieve autonomy, that is, act by reason of his own will and in accord with the laws that he himself accepts, without necessarily conceiving this to be outside the human community' (Todorov 2002: 33). What actually constitutes the "liberal human subject" is therefore already problematic, and in its most basic form posthumanism can arise from an acknowledgement of this and the desire to critically investigate and redefine what exactly we mean by "human" and what attributes we assign it. Responding to this prejudiced and somewhat unstable category, the "posthuman" signals 'the end of a certain conception of the human' (Hayles 1999: 286) – the liberal human subject, a rational and reasonable being. Posthumanism is therefore a field that has arisen from multiple critiques of the exclusivity of achieving the status of the "human" in all its privilege; for example, key critiques come from (but are not limited to) feminism, anti-colonialism, race studies, disability studies and queer studies.

A fixed bounded stable self

Much of the basic premise of the idea of a human being individual, autonomous and fully in control of their own thoughts and actions has, in more recent years, come into question. This idea of the "rational" being can be linked to the 'fiction of autonomous selfhood' (Blackman 2017). As Blackman (2017: n.p.n.) explains, '[t]his fiction is one that assumes that the human subject is ideally bounded, responsible for their actions, self-enclosed and able to develop or enact the capacity for change and transformation through their own agency' and as such has 'become part and parcel of how we are

governed and managed as citizens and populations' (Blackman 2008: 113). The rational, autonomous being is therefore a particular construction designed to suit a particular style of governmentality; by making the subject accountable they are also made controllable. This links to our current cultural context of neoliberalism (see Chapter 7: Emergent Subject Positions for further critique of this).

What the rational subject of humanism does not acknowledge is the much more porous, dispersed, intra-connected aspects of "being" that influence our daily existence. We are constantly entwined with others – human and non-human – around us, and this recognition has led to a renewed understanding of how and what we are affected by and how we are moved; the fact that our embodiment extends beyond our skin shows that the idea of the boundaries that separate "us" from the rest of the world are flawed when taking into perspective our distributed awareness and permeability. Although not specifically linked to posthumanism, Blackman's (2012) account of "immaterial bodies", for example, suggests an understanding of the self that is constantly permeable. She provides examples of this permeability from early psychology, where suggestion, hypnosis and "mental touch" trouble notions of separate, bounded bodies (Blackman 2012). In another example, crowd mentality represents a concept ripe for the interdependence of one body with another, and is clearly evident in a range of spaces, such as at festivals, dance and clubbing spaces (Blackman 2012; Thrift 2008; Henriques 2011). The experience of these spaces is not of an individual, unified body, but is rather experienced collectively and affectively (Wilde and Evans 2017: 3).

The different subjectivities that each one of us can embody at once also demonstrates how the idea of a unitary, stable sense of "self" is also flawed – we are many things at once and again, part of this is to do with who we are with, where we are in time or space, and how we intra-act with human and non-human others.

This entanglement is experienced in relation to technology in the way described by Toffoletti (2007: 2):

> [i]n this climate of biotechnologies, virtual worlds and digital manipulation, a relationship between the organism and the machine emerges that contests organic bodily boundaries, the locus of identity and the status of the human.

> Clear distinctions between what is real and what is virtual, where the body ends and technology begins, what is nature and what is machine, fracture and implode.

As Toffoletti (2007: 2) states, digital technologies are becoming more integrated into our everyday existence and bodies, expediting the fundamental reconsideration of how we conceive of the "human" as an ontologically distinct category. What is interesting about this acknowledgment is that we have a history in Western culture of personally augmenting ourselves for our own benefit – from clothes, to glasses, to walking sticks, to cars, to the telephone, mobile phone, internet and computers we have constantly been happy to capitalise on the permeability of the human and our ability to "extend" our embodied awareness. However, it is only recently that we have begun to consider what this deep intra-dependence between "self" and "others" might mean for the status of the human. In this regard, as the clear distinctions begin to collapse, we are then required to consider what Braidotti (2013) terms a "posthuman ethics". She states that in considering the subject in a non-unitary way we therefore encounter 'an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or "earth" others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism' (Braidotti 2013: 49-50).

The way humans use technology to "extend" the self clearly links to McLuhan's (1994 [1964]) thesis that media are the 'extensions of man'. McLuhan (1994 [1964]) argued the ways in which different media were an extension of a pre-existing human capability. However, as Herbrechter (2013: 50) states, 'McLuhan's radical analysis might still have been too anthropocentric'. Although Herbrechter (2013: 50) goes on to claim that McLuhan's work 'underestimates the extent to which technologization is changing us as a species', I would argue that the focus on "is changing us" could be more usefully considered as "has formed us". This view considers "technologization" not as a new, digital, virtual process but as a historic entanglement with and through "others". As stated, the human has always been able to "extend" itself, but what we are able to extend and adapt, how we can be changed, and our understanding of our position within our relationship with other media (and matter) is changing. A posthuman approach displaces the anthropocentric understanding of the stable human

extending themselves, and instead views this as a complex and non-hierarchical entanglement between intra-acting, mutually dependent, entities.

Therefore, in a posthuman view, rather than considering the human as the main benefactor in utilising and adapting the "other", be that technology, the environment, animals, etc. we instead consider that rather than these "others" being "extensions", they are in fact implicitly part of what it is to be human: 'that what defines humanness or humanicity to use Vicki Kirby's (2011) term is our mixed natures and that we are composite anthropods' (Blackman 2017: n.p.n.). "The human" is therefore 'profoundly dependent into its surroundings' (Pepperell 2003: 20). This acknowledgement allows us to consider these relationships as a mutual exchange in a more rhizomatic understanding of the perceived importance of the conjoined, intermingled, intra-acting elements. This moves us on to a third primary aspect of posthumanism – the turn away from anthropocentrism.

Anthropocentrism

As a result of this acknowledgement that we are neither stable unitary subjects unaffected by our interactions with "others"; and a recognition of how badly we have classified the "human" before in terms of privileging one type of human over another, we have begun to recognise that an anthropocentric attitude is also flawed. As stated above, our reliance on all things "other" demonstrates the entanglement of the "human". How can we claim that we are the centre of the universe, when we rely so heavily on our environment to thrive? Without air, food, water and shelter as a basic minimum we would not survive. To believe that human, let alone man, is the centre of the universe is a fallacy, and in recognising our reliance on the "others" around us we can begin to develop a more complex and, hopefully, a less hierarchical understanding of humans' place in the world. Braidotti (2013: 60) explains the key concept as follows:

> [p]ost-anthropocentrism is marked by the emergence of "the politics of life itself" (Rose 2007). "Life", far from being codified as the exclusive property or the unalienable right of one species, the human, over all others or of being sacralized as a pre-established given, is posited as a process, interactive and

open-ended.

In understanding this it might be suggested that assigning or defining basic rights we can soon see how privileged ideas of "life" travel. If we extend certain "rights" to humans, and we then manage to reach a point where the "human" who receives those rights is any human and not just a fixed stereotype or the "right kind" of human, we then begin to move this critique into other realms, questioning, for example, our understanding of animal others. As Wolfe (2010: 99) states, there have previously been aspects of animal rights that have remained inherently humanist. Where ethical consideration has been broadened to incorporate previously marginalised "others" this does not always amount to the destabilisation of the role of the human (Wolfe 2010: 99). Braidotti (2013: 79) similarly argues that "animal rights" do not always attend to the specificity of animals, but imposes an anthropomorphism which belies the inter-relation between human and animal. This anthropomorphism is evident in the current situation where animal rights only extend to a certain limitation of "animal" (in much the same way as human rights extending to only a certain type of human). From this perspective we then might question, for example, why invertebrates should be afforded less of an ethical review of care than vertebrates.

The answer is undoubtedly anthropocentric – we have come to care more for those creatures who have either become useful to us, or companions to us, and they become the ones that we are more willing to anthropomorphise. This is apparent in the way in which we respond with moral outrage towards those who are cruel to, for example, dogs – a companion species that we have not only domesticated but now also project human qualities onto and hold fictional dialogues with[6]. On the other hand, should the animal be considered to inconvenience or disgust us there is far less issue taken with, for example, using poisonous sprays, available at supermarkets and convenience stores nationwide, to eliminate flies. A hierarchy is therefore obviously still imposed, and this needs further displacement in order to reach the full potential, or promise, of post-anthropocentrism. As Braidotti (2013: 67) states: '[p]ost-

[6] For more critical analysis of companion species and humans' relationships with dogs in particular see Haraway's (2003) *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness*.

anthropocentrism displaces the notion of a species hierarchy and of a single, common standard for "Man" as the measure of all things. In the ontological gap thus opened, other species come galloping in'. These "other species" encompass all elements of life, from animal to earth and even machine, but, as indicated, we are not yet at a point where this is being fully acknowledged, or accepted.

There is, however, evidence that this is changing. For example, such a line of questioning inevitably leads to not only a reconsideration of such ethics and speciesism on smaller scales but also larger, considering the earth as an ecosystem. Disrupting our position of power within that system and destabilising the idea that the environment should serve humankind has led to an accounting of our vast impact on it. Characterised as the anthropocene, researchers in this field explore the current period as one in which the geological and ecological impact of humanity has been the dominant influence on the planet, referencing climate change as one example of this (see, for various discussions, the Critical Climate Change book series edited by Cohen and Colebrook, Open Humanities Press 2017). From a post-anthropocentric viewpoint, these environmentally detrimental (potentially disastrous) ramifications are unacceptable, unsustainable, and unethical. In order to combat these negative consequences, rights are also being fought for other, environmental, entities, for example, in the case of the Whanganui river in New Zealand, which has been granted legal status as a living entity in March 2017 in an attempt to protect and conserve the Māori ancestral river (Roy 2017).

Elsewhere, some forms of posthumanist research acknowledge our deep entanglements with nature through fields such as plant studies: reconceiving plants as active and intelligent agents and questioning how they influence the construction of "the human" (Ryan 2015). In tandem, as well as a reconsideration of our position in the hierarchy of "natural" life, there has also been a rethinking of the role of "objects" and material others. Again, if we displace the human from the centre of our worldview we begin to see the vitality in "others" – evident in the work of Bennett's (2010: vii) *Vibrant Matter*, which disrupts the binary of 'dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)'.

It is arguments such as these that have then also led to a rise in the field of

"robot ethics" (Lin et al. 2012). If matter is vibrant, and if the earth should not be thought of as in servitude to humanity, then why should our machines? A focus on 'thing-power' (Bennett 2010: 4)[7] with a post-anthropocentric attitude is also apparent in object-oriented ontologies (OOO) and philosophies, which put 'things at the center of being' and suggest that 'humans are elements, but not the sole elements, of philosophical interest' (Bogost 2012: 6)[8]. If we acknowledge that humans are not the most significant species or entity on the earth then we should also, accordingly, look to our technologies and machines and begin to consider where we stand in relation to them.

Multifaceted

> My sense of posthumanism […] comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanisms […]. But it comes after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms (but also thrusts them on us), a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon. (Wolfe 2010: xv- xvi)

[7] In the context of my research it is worth nothing that Ash (2012a: 10) has already claimed that videogames have thing-power 'insofar as they contain a dynamic which exceeds both the players' and designers' intentions'.

[8] Whilst there are clear overlaps between OOO and posthumanism, Bogost (2012: 8) suggests that '[p]osthumanism, we might conclude, is not posthuman enough'. However, it isn't entirely clear *which* posthumanism Bogost feels is insufficient (see Bogost 2012: 16-17 where he derides a posthumanism that focusses on human enhancement whilst lauding Bryant's (2011: 40) definition of a posthuman ontology as among, entangled, and implicated in other beings). Whilst the position and power of objects and others certainly should (and, in this thesis, does) change from that of a humanist perspective, my own research focusses on posthuman subjectivity rather than OOO in order to find new ways of understanding our subjectivity in relation to this shift. The way we make sense of our selves is flawed and should be re-examined, but we still need to make sense of ourselves somehow.

As is made clear from the above quote from Wolfe (2010: xv-xvi) it is useful to consider the pervasiveness of our posthuman-ness both in terms of pre- and post-humanism. This is not meant in a sense that the posthuman comes after or is a successor to the "human", rather, the posthuman is, as Wolfe (2010: xv-xvi) states, a shift in the understanding of the role of the human. Thus "posthuman" means after a particular *understanding* of the human, which was ethically and conceptually flawed, not after the human in its current physical, biological, or mediated forms. As Blackman (2017: n.p.n.) explains:

> [i]f we are all aliens, then perhaps this will provide the grounds for an ethics and philosophy that can counter the harsh and barbaric articulation of difference as otherness, which has marginalised, persecuted, discriminated against and drawn lines around who and whose lives count, and come to matter within the context of the category of the human.

The "posthuman" is therefore not a figure that comes "after" the human in a way that might indicate a new form of evolution or enhancement. However, critiquing, rejecting, and rethinking the attributes of humanism allows us to view our relationships with non-human "others" in ways that do not perceive the human as superior or separate to and from its surroundings, but instead considers us as constantly *intra*-acting (Barad 2007), which sheds new light on potential subjectivities. Rather than two distinct categories of subject and object "inter"acting, components "intra"act meaning that the ability to act emerges from within the relationship not from outside of it. The destabilising of the liberal human subject is therefore extended through the critique of its accompanying 'notions of free will, autonomy, rationality, [and] consciousness as the seed of identity' (Hayles cited in Kroker 2012: 11) as we instead begin to acknowledge our deep intra-dependence with "external" factors.

Whilst in both popular and critical discourse our relationships with technologies have sparked 'the haunting temptation of overcoming that finitude of the embodiment' (Tufekci 2012: 35) that is simultaneously conceived of as either utopian or dystopian;

from a posthuman perspective these technological intimacies signal just another way in which the idea of the subject as a site of control, autonomy and mastery has been disrupted.

In this sense it is also important to make clear that this is where my distinction between posthuman and transhuman should be articulated. Again, "transhuman" is a slippery term and encompasses a variety of positions. I am, however, wary of the term and much of its associated research and reading as often the idea of the transhuman comes from a perspective of transcendence: the return of an idea of dualism, that our minds and bodies are not inextricably linked but our informational mind can be uploaded to a computer and we can be "disembodied". Often "transhumanism" refers to a desire for the advancement of evolution of the human being such that it undergoes a radical transformation and "overcomes" the "limitations" of the human body (More 2013: 3-4). In many ways the transhumanist desire to overcome the "meat flesh" of the body links back the Cartesian mantra of "I think therefore I am". In Descartes (1924 [1637]) opinion the act of "thinking" is the only thing that can truly be known. Whilst he could imagine that he had no body, or that the world might not exist, he could not imagine not thinking, therefore it must be (Descartes 1924 [1637]). He uses this thought experiment to conclude:

> I was a substance whose whole essence or nature consists only in thinking, and which, that it may exist, has need of no place, nor is dependent on any material thing; so that "I," that is to say, the mind by which I am what I am, is wholly distinct from the body, and is even more easily known than the latter, and is such, that although the latter were not, it would still continue to be all that it is. (Descartes 1924 [1637]: 31)

Descartes (1924 [1637]) therefore suggests a mind/body dualism, not only marking the mind and body as distinct from one another, but *privileging* the mind over the body. Where Descartes (1924 [1637]) states: 'the soul is of a nature wholly independent of the body, and that consequently it is not liable to die with the latter' transhumanists also believe in the ability of the mind to go on living without the body.

Furthermore, Roden's (2015: 13) critique of transhumanism usefully identifies that '[t]ranshumanists also sign up to this ethical view of humans as uniquely autonomous or self-fashioning animals. Like their humanist forebears, transhumanists think that human-distinctive capacities like rationality, compassion and aesthetic appreciation are intrinsically valuable and should be cultivated and protected'. This is reinforced by More's (2013: 5) assertion that self-direction and rational thinking are founding principles of transhumanism – and as I explained above these autonomous, individual-oriented values are not in line with the version of posthumanism that I employ.

Rather than viewing our connections with computers or avatars as a precursor to an ability to upload our minds to computers, I instead believe in the embodied, embedded, and everyday use of machines (to cite Hine's (2015) approach to internet research). I am not advocating nor seeking a relationship with machines that looks towards a disembodied future – as this thesis shows I am instead detailing the many ways in which are bodies are affected, and we are physically and emotionally moved by our relationship with technological others. This, to me, is a far more realistic symptom of our increasing connection with machines, and is therefore one worth exploring. It is important that we consider new ways of understanding our subjectivities that account for these relationships in ways that neither trivialise nor radicalise the potentials for human-machine intra-action, and instead account for these entanglements as symptomatic of our *history* of entanglements with technological and non-technological "others". However, because there is not a single definition of "human", "posthuman" or "transhuman" this understanding of the term will doubtless clash with other definitions in the field, and this is precisely why it is so necessary for me to contextualise and position my study within this field.

The posthuman gamer

So far I have outlined some of the key aspects of what can constitute or be meant by the term "posthumanism". As a philosophical or theoretical framework posthumanism draws on these concepts. The being that then embodies these philosophies, theories, or values, is therefore the posthuman. In this thesis I suggest drawing on a notion of "the posthuman" that posits new forms of subjectivity have been emerging in

technologically mediated societies, which nevertheless only serve to highlight already existing forms of subjectivity that are neither necessarily high-tech, nor disembodied (Braidotti 2013; Hayles 2006; Herbrechter 2013). Instead, what is suggested is a view of subjectivity that is not singular, unchanging or self-contained, and so rejects many of the ideas implicit in the concept of the liberal human subject (e.g. autonomy, self-determination and individualism).

To be entangled and post-anthropocentric does not, therefore, require a digital environment, and neither does the posthuman. Whilst some might consider the focus on the MMORPG avatar-gamer as an indication that I believe posthuman subjectivity to only occur within technologically mediated environments, this is not the case. However, Braidotti (2013: 92) has argued that contemporary machines facilitate interrelations and 'stand for radical relationality' and so MMORPG gaming provides a particular context for me to explore a posthuman practice that *is* digitally entangled. I therefore utilise certain aspects from understandings of the posthuman that are more technologically dependent when theorising the subjectivity emerging from avatar and gamer. For example, Toffoletti (2007: 27-28) states:

> to be posthuman is to construct a notion of self within a culture of simulation, virtuality and the digital. It is a new mode of existence by which the subject comes into being, as distinctions collapse between nature and artifice, self and computer, virtual and real, animate and inanimate.

Using Toffoletti's (2007) idea, I suggest that the MMORPG gamer represents a specific example of an embodiment of posthuman subjectivity. In the virtual, simulated gameworld a "notion of self" is constructed wherein the distinctions between avatar and gamer collapse, forming a new notion of "self". By drawing on this quote (and others related specifically to a technologically dependent posthumanism) I am not proposing that we are "human" and that through gaming or digital engagement we "become posthuman" – that is not my belief. The above arguments in this chapter demonstrate the "always posthuman-ness" of our existence through our entanglements, and our relations and intra-actions with that which is outside of our skin demonstrates our

reliance on our environments and technologies in forming the "human". We are always engaged in multiple intra-actions, some of which are beyond our conscious awareness. However, as a research project, this thesis focusses on specific conscious observations around the emergence of a particular posthuman subjectivity. My argument is that avatar-gamer entanglement provides a useful example to demonstrate the posthuman subject that is 'an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction' (Hayles 1999: 3). Maintained by both the game and the gamer, this posthuman subjectivity is a form of shared, intra-dependent agency, a blend of material gamer and informational avatar as created and hosted by the game.

It could be argued that Hayles' (1999) posthumanism is less radical than some in her use of "boundaries" between components, where others suggest there are none. That said, the entity that Hayles' (1999) proposes is still one that works with aspects of permeability and post-anthropocentrism that are central to my argument. In developing this line of thought, and in order to destabilise the "separation" between avatar and gamer further, a more "radical" posthumanism that disrupts such boundaries is seen in Barad's (2003: 815) work that explores the notion of phenomena as 'the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting "components."' In Barad's (2003; 2007) terms, the human does not operate outside or aside from technology. Instead, we are entangled, which is 'not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence' (Barad 2007: ix – see Chapter 5: From Acting to Intra-acting for more explanation of the posthuman gamer in these terms). Responsibility is distributed among the constituent entities (in the case of this research these entities would be of avatar and gamer, not to mention the unexplored others[9]) and our agency emerges as an ability to act within a certain context.

As Barad (2007: 136) states, '[p]osthumanism does not presume that man is the measure of all things […] Posthumanism doesn't presume the separateness of any-"thing," let alone the alleged spatial, ontological, and epistemological distinction that sets humans apart'. I agree with Barad's (2007) view of humans as constantly intra-

[9] As Barad (2007: x) states 'entanglements are not isolated binary coproductions' but in order to refine the trajectory of this thesis it is only the avatar and gamer that I focus on. This is a superficial cut, but one that is enacted in order to give clarity and coherency to the argument.

acting, and that the "human" cannot be meaningfully separated from the "non-human". However, where Barad (2007: 183) argues that these terms (human/non-human) present a dichotomy that is precisely against a posthumanist account, I nevertheless include the notions of "human" and "non-human" to more clearly articulate my argument. This is particularly important given the specific context that I am discussing. Whilst '[p]osthuman subjectivity reshapes the identity of humanistic practices, by stressing heteronomy and multi-faceted relationality, instead of autonomy and self-referential disciplinary purity' (Braidotti 2013: 145) the intra-action within the context of *World of Warcraft* provides a specific way of exploring that heteronomy and relationality.

To be clear: whilst "humans" are not separate from "non-human" others that they rely on and are entangled with, Barad (2007) argues that differential boundaries between "humans and "non-humans" are enacted through intra-actions. Therefore, as not all "humans" (or even all "posthumans") are familiar with the specific context of playing with an avatar in a digital world what is at study here is a specific intra-action; the avatar-gamer intra-action is what Barad (2003: 817) would term a 'material enactment'. The avatar in *World of Warcraft* therefore offers a seemingly very *explicit* example of what could traditionally be conceived of as an "external other" to provide a context to explore the deep entanglements that occur in these intra-actions. In exploring a context where the "otherness" of components might seem "obvious", and drawing attention to the 'practices through which these differential boundaries [of the categories of human and non-human] are stabilized and destabilized' (Barad 2007: 66) to demonstrate posthuman subjectivity in this context, it is my aim that we are able to develop an understanding that allows us to be better equipped to then critically analyse more *implicit* aspects of our posthuman subjectivities.

From this perspective, the entanglement that I suggest gamers experience with their avatars and the subjectivity that arises therein is therefore just one example of emotional, physical and cognitive distribution. In this example, and for the purposes of my PhD, this is a technologically mediated posthuman subjectivity, however that isn't to say that the same principles and conclusions of the research cannot be applied in other contexts, or that other examples would not prove to be just as illuminating. Gaming is the context; posthuman subjectivity is the study. Yet, it is my proposal that gaming nevertheless represents an apt example of posthuman subjectivity as

experienced from an entanglement of "human" and "non-human" entities (Simon 2006; Boulter 2015). I do not want to propose a gaming exceptionalism: however, gaming does provide a strong example where we see a 'relationship between organism and the machine' (Toffoletti 2007: 2) that challenges clear distinction. As Boulter (2015: 2) points out, 'gaming enacts [...] a practical realization that the human is a fluid, dynamic, unstable, discontinuous entity. The digital game thus, in its radical critique of the idea of a transparent, unified self, becomes a site of interrogation and sustained philosophical analysis'. Using gaming as a context to explore the lived experience of a posthuman subjectivity I consider how we can critically examine the avatar-gamer to see how this subjectivity is constructed and accounted for.

In the interrelation of the avatar and the gamer we could argue that the melding of game and gamer constitutes the posthuman subject that is 'seamlessly articulated with an intelligent machine' (Shinkle 2012: 103) as experienced gameplayers know automatically where to place their fingers to touch buttons without looking, anticipating and reacting to the bodies on their screen and engaging in a cognitive, emotional and mental flow; demonstrating a particular material enactment of posthuman subjectivity.

Gaming culture research has already recognised the subjective effects of gameplay experiences. The concept of the cyborg as a metaphor of human-machine hybridity (Haraway 1991) has been extensively used by game research to understand new subjective experiences enabled by the game. O'Riordan (2001), for example, explores her relationship with the avatar-character Lara Croft from the game *Tomb Raider* as one cyborg-subjectivity activated by human agency, and so moves us away from dystopian constructs of technological determinism. Drawing on the cyborg, research has also shown interconnections between real life and game life (e.g. Taylor 2006) and technology and culture (e.g. Crogan and Kennedy 2009). Research has paid attention to the way the game allows a heightened experience of the cyborg-body, through for example rumble packs and the gameplay visuals (e.g. where the avatar's experience of blindness or blurred vision is re-presented on screen) (Lahti 2003). Such research usefully demonstrates the promise of the cyborg is mythical, showing how notions of the transcendental body overlook that we are still located in gender, class and race structures (Lahti 2003).

The cyborg usefully demonstrates one extension of self through gameplay. But for some, this is an approach whereby the avatar is merely a vessel waiting for the player to inhabit, and not a relationship that flows both ways. O'Riordan's (2001) emphasis on human agency, for example, focuses too much on the human capacity in the gaming relationship, and her conception instead still adheres to a hierarchical consideration of the place of human/machine relationships, embodiments and subjectivities. Although O'Riordan's (2001: 236) understanding acknowledges some hybridity of avatar/gamer, as well as highlighting the role of embodiment and affect, she specifies that 'the player enters into a symbiotic hybridity which negotiates game space so that the self becomes the self-and-avatar, in a diffuse but distinct relationship between person and machine'. Again the differentiation between this cyborg-based view and a posthuman perspective would be in a posthumanist acknowledgement that technology does not constitute a binary opposition to the human. It is instead through our relationships with technology that the human is constituted. This works on several layers: it signifies an understanding that humans are technologically facilitated / augmented / constructed beings, but it also draws on the notion that our "individual" agencies are in fact only contextual. For example, in the same way that I can only drive a car because of the car, I can only play a videogame because of the game. These relationships with technology are therefore not us exerting a control over our machines, but our machines "controlling" our behaviours, agencies, possibilities, and therefore subjectivities. "I" am therefore constituted as much (if not more so) by my available "technologies" than I am by my physical self.

Farrow and Iacovides (2012: 5) state that '[w]e do not relate to bodies in virtual world […] in the same way that we relate to our own corporeality […] phenomena are experienced as representation, not as subjective experience'. My understanding of gameplay is a counterpoint to such perspectives – gaming is a fully embodied, emotional and shared experience. In taking on this perspective, I side with Banks' (2015) critique of avatar-gamer research, who disagrees with work suggesting a one-directional and wholly separate embodiment that moves from gamer to avatar, which produces a hierarchical relationship between human and non-human.

To move beyond the unidirectional and vessel-like avatar, other research has documented the complexity of the avatar-gamer relationship in more posthuman, or

post-anthropocentric ways. Gee (2008: 259) suggests that the avatar allows for a 'projection' of the gamer's desires and intentions. However, Gee (2008) also suggests that this is a two-way process, where the gamer also conforms to the desires and intentions of the game (for more on this see Chapter 6: Enacting Empathy). Gaming thus becomes an exchange, allowing for negotiation between avatar and gamer. Taylor (2009) too highlights the importance of thinking about gameplay as an assemblage, an interrelationship between various components that flattens out hierarchies between avatar and gamer and where agency exists outside of any particular agent (see also Filiciak 2003; Shinkle 2012). A more seamless intra-action between avatar and gamer is proposed here, which opens up the space for thinking of the relationship between "human" and "machine". This comes closer to the kinds of posthuman subjectivity that I also suggest is engendered by Sundén's (2012) research, and which allows a romantic relationship that is neither completely embodied by avatar nor gamer.

In her autoethnographic study, Sundén and her avatar, Bricka, form a romantic relationship with another avatar, Slap. Sundén's (2012) analysis of this human-machine relationship explores the interconnections between herself, her avatar, and the avatar of the other player, suggesting that the relationship complicates notions of one body and one subjectivity, given the multiplicity of performers, both human and non-human, that took part in the romance (Wilde and Evans 2017). Reflecting on her desire for the other avatar-gamer, Sundén (2012: 169) asks: '[w]as it her, regardless of the game? Was it her through the game? Was it her through the orc woman and the ways in which she moved and talked and somehow managed to reach out to me and touch something within me through the screen?'. The mediation of digital romantic attachments through the psychical bodies that control their movements means that spaces between subjectivities refuse clear separation between avatar and gamer: '"Hi Jenny and Bricka! I smile. Slap grins. We flex our muscles"' (Sundén 2012: 174).

Sundén's (2012: 177) own relationship to her avatar-self is described as '[p]art identification, part desire'. Sundén (2012: 177) explains her connection to Bricka as both an inseparable sameness and fascinated difference: this incorporation being 'an intriguing part of game experiences'. Along with Sundén (2012) and others (e.g. Filiciak 2003; Gee 2008), I also argue for a horizontal, interdependent relationship in avatar-gamer interaction: what is new in this thesis is the alignment of this with

posthuman theory (see for exception Boulter 2015 on how gaming enacts and narrates posthuman themes) and the move from interaction to intra-action as per Barad's (2007) notion of entanglement, which I similarly extend to intra-dependence rather than interdependence.

Where the romantic relationship between avatar-gamer and another avatar-gamer might seem remarkable, these experiences have become increasingly everyday. In the 'networked society' personal lives are increasingly co-constructed through technological interaction with a screen (McCarthy 2001). Recent approaches document the very embodied, emotional and connected meanings of technologically enabled subjective experiences in games (e.g. Taylor 2006). For example, Filiciak (2003) notes how gameplay actions have a real effect on the subject, and so constitutes an important part of their experience. He suggests these connections bring us closer to new sets of interrelated subjectivities that are not bound in the same way by traditional territories or industries (e.g. local villages or venues for consumption). Shinkle (2012) too notes how interaction between player and screen creates a connection, not only of excitement and awe, but also repetition, boredom, and frustration: for example, when the machine crashes or fails to load properly. Not necessarily utopian or remarkable, such emotional accounts of digital culture demonstrate the capacity for feelings of belonging (Ferreday 2009), affective responses (Karatzogianni and Kuntsman 2012) and embodied, visceral ways of interacting with the screen (Hillis 1999). However, although much research has demonstrated the extensions of the body through an online, digital and networked society, few have drawn a close conceptual link between gaming and posthuman subjectivity (Wilde and Evans 2017: 3).

Drawing on aspects of intra-action, entanglement, and post-anthropocentrism, I have demonstrated how posthuman subjectivity can be used to define gameplay, as a fluid, horizontal and relational experience between human and machine. However, such a claim does not explain what facilitates this subjectivity, especially if we understand posthuman subjectivity existing everywhere, as a general state of "humanness" (Braidotti 2013). Nor does the definition of gameplay as posthuman make sense of the very visceral emotions that take place, such that one can fall in love during gameplay with another avatar (Wilde and Evans 2017). In this thesis, I propose drawing on this specific material enactment of posthuman subjectivity in order to better understand how

our intra-actions operate and how our entanglements are facilitated.

Posthumanising traditionally humanist traits

As stated, this thesis works alongside various forms of posthumanism, but draws most specifically on the technologically mediated posthuman as an example to provide context to the study of subjectivity. Having said this, the way in which I explore the posthuman subjectivity is by considering how this subjectivity is felt, experienced and made sense of. It is my belief that even though there are many ways in which the classification of "posthuman" is far more fitting than the traits associated with the "human" to account for our entangled states of being, it is nevertheless problematic to assume that this will radically alter the ways in which we actually experience our daily life. Rather than turning completely away from humanist concepts we instead need to re-interrogate them in order to find the usefulness with them; these "humanist" discourses have shaped us – our behaviours, our engagements and the ways in which we make sense of our selves and our experiences.

The following quote from Wolfe (2010: xxv), which I break down below, is useful in articulating my stance towards accounting for the posthuman lived experience:

> [t]o return, then, to the question of posthumanism, the perspective I attempt to formulate here – far from surpassing or rejecting the human – actually enables us to describe the human and its characteristic modes of communication, interaction, meaning, social significations, and affective investments with greater specificity once we have removed meaning from the ontologically closed domain of conscious-ness, reason, reflection, and so on.

I am not rejecting the human in terms of suggesting we radically overthrow or disavow any of our ways of feeling in the world (beyond anthropocentric, liberal humanist behaviours and worldviews). I am instead hoping that I can take up Wolfe's (2010) claim and describe some of our experiences with more specificity precisely through paying close attention to the relationship with our technologies from a posthuman

perspective, which acknowledges our entangled selves and accounts for the technology as an equally important part (in this example) of the avatar-gamer subjectivity. Wolfe (2010: xxv) continues:

> [i]t forces us to rethink our taken-for-granted modes of human experience, including the normal perceptual modes and affective states of Homo sapiens itself, by recontextualizing them in terms of the entire sensorium of other living beings and their own autopoietic ways of "bringing forth a world".

In using performance, empathy, and aspects of subject formation as my main themes to analyse the posthuman subjectivity enacted between avatar and gamer, I am recontextualising these traits or qualities by expanding what might have been traditionally "humanistic" actions and posthumanising them. This involves examining these traits from a posthuman perspective, considering how they are both challenged and enhanced by a posthumanist reading, reconceiving of them in these terms and rewriting them to operate in a posthuman account of subjectivity. I therefore blend principles of posthumanism (e.g. a post-anthropocentric acknowledgement of the entanglement of beings) with the principles of performance, empathy, and our desires for achievement, progression, and development (see individual chapters 5-7 for explicit explanation of how these themes are "posthumanised").

Wolfe (2010: xxv) goes on to state that his perspective on posthumanism also attends to the 'specificity of the human'. Whilst such attention might be accused of becoming once more humanistic in its approach, he describes the specificity of the human in similar terms to the originary prosthesis and the "always posthuman" ways discussed above – stating that humans have co-evolved with technicity and materiality in ways that have fundamentally formed what the human "is". In order to attend to the human in these intra-active, entangled, co-evolved ways, the analytics that I use of acting, empathy, and subject formation are themselves demonstrative of our entangled humanity, as chapters 5-7 demonstrate.

However, it is also important to state that those analytics – acting, empathy, and subject formation – are things that we as humans (however flawed that term may be)

feel and experience in our daily lives. I am not attempting to overcomplicate or offer a radically reconstructed view of our lived experience; I am using the experiences that we already have and are familiar with but interrogating them further through the lens of posthumanism.

I believe that this is an important step in theorising the posthuman as it deals with concrete examples and practices that we engage in and demonstrates their potential to be posthumanised, and therefore, our potential to account for a posthuman life. This therefore demonstrates not only *how* we are posthuman, and extends our understanding of the "formation" or emergence of posthuman subjectivities and entanglements; but also offers examples to follow in thinking or acting in a posthuman way. Rather than denying our posthumanity, and conceiving of our practices as coherently conceived and mastered, posthumanising our own understanding of these practices could be seen as a very practical step in posthuman ethics that follows Braidotti's (2013: 95) 'ethics based on the primacy of the relation, of interdependence, [and] values *zoe*[10] in itself'. Whilst Braidotti (2013) suggest an ethics based on seeing the self as radically relational and non-unitary, the posthuman acting, posthuman empathy, and posthuman subject formation I propose in chapters 5-7 of this thesis demonstrate ways of putting this ethical belief into practice.

Conclusion

The above has provided a basic introduction to some of the ideas from within posthumanism that I draw on for my thesis. I do not view the posthuman as having to be technologically augmented, and instead draw on broader themes of post-anthropocentrism, the entanglement of the "human", and the instability of the "self" to situate my own posthuman subjectivity. In this regard I agree with those who have gone before that we have always been posthuman – the category of the human has been flawed and ill-defined, and the promise of "the posthuman" is not in offering an entirely "new" way of being but in re-addressing the question of what it is to be human, and providing a different understanding. In order to explore posthuman subjectivity further I consider it not only as something that we are and that we embody, but something that

[10] *Zoe* as 'the non-human, vital force of Life' (Braidotti 2013: 60).

can be facilitated through certain practices. By applying posthuman ideals or values to practices that we engage in – "posthumanising" them – the aim of this thesis is to better understand our posthuman subjectivities, how they are lived and how they are experienced. I therefore draw on a particular enactment of posthuman subjectivity to ground this study. The MMORPG gamer is just one example that could have been chosen, but I believe it is an example that clearly demonstrates how that which we understand as "external", "other", "machine", or "virtual" can become as much a part of how we understand ourselves as any other technology or "other". In this thesis the informational avatar forms the posthuman subjectivity that emerges as much as "I" do. At times, because this example *is* a digital manifestation, I draw on posthuman themes or literature that link to digital "others" to illuminate the relationship between avatar and gamer. However, this should not be taken to mean that this thesis and its arguments are technologically deterministic or essentialist. The "humanist" practices I draw on and "posthumanise" – acting, empathy, subject formation – are all applicable to a range of scenarios and situations. In applying these to my analysis of the lived experience of posthuman subjectivity I demonstrate the ways in which we might go on to apply a posthuman approach to all of our practices, and begin to understand our ways of being in the world in a less anthropocentric light.

In the following chapter, I discuss the way that I account for "the posthuman" by "immersing" myself in a specific entanglement and exploring the emergent posthuman subjectivity autoethnographically. As Rutsky (1999: 21-22)[11] explains, we

[11] 'The position of human beings in relation to this techno-cultural unconscious cannot, therefore, be that of the analyst (or theorist) who, standing outside this space, presumes to know or control it. It must instead be a relation of connection to, of interaction with, that which has been seen as "other," including the unsettling processes of techno-culture itself. To accept this relation is to let go of part of what it has meant to be human, to be a human subject, and to allow ourselves to change, to mutate, to become alien, cyborg, posthuman. This mutant, posthuman status is not a matter of armoring the body, adding robotic prostheses, or technologically transferring consciousness from the body; it is not, in other words, a matter of fortifying the boundaries of the subject, of securing identity as a fixed entity. It is rather a matter of unsecuring the subject, of acknowledging the relations and mutational processes that constitute it. A posthuman subject position would, in other words, acknowledge the otherness that is part of us. It would involve opening the boundaries of individual and collective identity, changing the relations that have distinguished between subject and object, self and other, us and them. This change is itself a mutational process that cannot be rationally predicted or controlled; it can only be imagined, figured, through a techno-cultural process that is at once science-fictional and aesthetic. It is only through opening ourselves to this kind of creative process, by taking part in the complex web of relations in which we are implicated, rather than simply trying to control them, that we can hope to

need to interact with the techno-cultural climate, allowing ourselves to change, opening ourselves up to our posthuman subject position, accepting that we are unstable, technologically shaped, in order to imagine, represent, and understand how our future could unfold.

In using my own experiences in *World of Warcraft* and developing a specific relationship and subjectivity with a non-human "other" I have "become posthuman" (whilst equally arguing that I already was, I have nevertheless become a part of another posthuman subjectivity which is specific to my relationship and entanglement with my avatar Etyme). By employing the terminology of "becoming", I am explicitly aligning myself with a body of work that proposes that the "human subject" is never complete, but is in a constant process of changing and adapting (Stagoll 2005). The unsecured subject that Rutsky (1999) mentions is evident in my fieldnotes, which flow between a sense of "me", "her", "us" and "we", acknowledging how Etyme reconstitutes the sense of subjectivity. I view her not as an object and instead embody the complexities that have arisen from being so intimately involved with technology, in order to then attempt to account for it in ways that both emphasise the posthuman experience but are nevertheless accessibly "human" and familiar through their written style.

imagine, to bring to representation, a future that, though it may seem unpredictable and alien, will inevitably be our own.' (Rutsky 1999: 21-22)

Chapter 3: Embracing Methodological Contradictions

'I speak as an ''I,'' but do not make the mistake of thinking that I know precisely all that I am doing when I speak in that way.' (Butler 2005: 84)

'Self is fleeting.' (Rambo Ronai 1992: 107)

Introduction

In the previous chapter I made a claim for the MMORPG gamer as an embodiment of posthuman subjectivity, drawing on posthuman thought most clearly aligned with Barad (2007), Braidotti (2013), and Hayles (1999). However, claiming gaming as an example of a posthuman entanglement does not "do" much on its own in terms of advancing posthuman research, and does not make sense of the experience. In order to contribute to new forms of knowledge and new ways of making sense of this (posthuman) subject formation, this thesis explores this entanglement as lived experience and aims to make sense of the visceral emotions and affects that occur through the embodiment at study. In the following chapter I outline my methodology. Whilst I would not primarily situate my research within the field of game studies but instead that of "posthuman studies",[12] I nevertheless draw on game studies methods as the game is the site of the research, if not the only focus. The approach is then informed by my posthuman ontological and epistemological standpoint, which is woven throughout.

The avatar-gamer relationship has been explored in a variety of ways throughout the history of game studies. However, as I demonstrate below, not all of these are suitable for exploring a posthuman subject formation. Drawing on more creative and reflexive approaches, I use an autoethnographic approach to research my own experience as a gamer in *World of Warcraft*. However, as this chapter demonstrates, this is not unproblematic, and a posthumanist approach is negotiated in order to complement the main theoretical framework of this thesis.

This thesis utilises the MMORPG gamer as one example of posthuman subjectivity in order to critically consider this phenomenon and analyse how it is

[12] I suspect this title will be adopted more widely in the future as 2017 sees the launch of the *Journal of Posthuman Studies*.

facilitated and experienced. Digital games have brought about an interesting development in the study of our interaction with technology. Whilst by no means the only medium that posthuman subjectivity could be explored through, the medium provides a very specific and very *explicit* aspect of becoming engaged with technology in ways that makes our entanglement both obvious and, therefore, hard to deny.

Game studies research

Game studies is a relatively new field in which scholars, academics, practitioners and enthusiasts have been able to begin to critically explore how this apparently ludic, entertainment based industry has given us opportunities to play with different "versions" of the self, or self-expression (see, for example, Wolf and Perron 2003; Garrelts 2005). The analysis of videogames can be considered in a variety of different ways, through notions of work, play, narrative, art, and performance, as well as educational potentials in serious gaming (Wolf and Perron 2003: 2). This demonstrates the multiple ways of studying gameplay, and the field of game studies continues to thrive and grow, exploring the capacity of games as a tool to investigate communication, culture and media.

In some ways, this field being in its infancy has allowed a form of freedom to game studies. Unhindered by preconceived ideas of what it should or shouldn't do, game studies has begged, borrowed and stolen from other fields in order to make sense of its own. As such game studies theory has brought together:

> a convergence of a wide variety of approaches including film and television theory, semiotics, performance theory, game studies, literary theory, computer science, theories of hypertext, cybertext, interactivity, identity, postmodernism, ludology, media theory, narratology, aesthetics and art theory, psychology, theories of simulacra, and others (Wolf and Perron 2003: 2)[13].

[13] See Evans and Stasi (2014: 6) for a similar argument about fan studies, where they term fan studies a 'melting pot' that draws from a wide range of disciplines.

In the "short" history of game studies (initially appearing in the early 1970s), scholars have therefore explored the economic implications of games (e.g. Castronova 2003), the ways in which we play (e.g. Bartle 1996), the relationship between players and their avatars (e.g. Banks 2015), ludic vs. narrative involvement (e.g. Frasca 2003), and immersion (e.g. Cairns et al. 2014). Whilst some studies focus on the temporality of gameplay as an "escape" from reality (for a discussion of the problematic binaries of such thinking, see Calleja 2010), other studies consider the far-reaching social and cultural consequences of our gameplay (e.g. Kolo and Baur 2004; Simon 2006). Many of these studies are fascinating, but, to me, the view of gaming as a temporary fictitious engagement with an escapist reality can be demeaning to the experience. For example, Boulter (2015: 28), whose work looks explicitly at the gamer as a "parable" for the posthuman, still falls into the narrative of viewing the gamer-as-posthuman as 'an imaginative, temporary escape from the claims of the material world, the world of real bodies'. This enforces the very binaries of virtuality vs. materiality that posthumanism in some guises seeks to overcome, and therefore imposes a reductionist view that I want to avoid in my own research – I argue that our relationships with technology are not an escape from our own subjectivities, they are precisely what shape them in posthuman ways.

Despite the range of approaches in game studies, there has been a notable lack of literature that has examined the gamer as posthuman, aside from Boulter's 2015 publication, and some minor links drawn by Shinkle (2012) and Filiciak (2003), as well as Simon's (2006) mention of the idea of the posthuman socialities that gaming may form. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there has been extensive research into the game/gamer/avatar relationship using various interpretations of cyborg theory. O'Riordan (2001: 232) states that the cyborg is a 'useful model to articulate the relationship between player and avatar' as it works on the basis of a relationship born out of intimacy. However, I disagree with O'Riordan's (2001: 232) claims that the game is a 'static artefact which is only activated by organic agency'. Her view is still much more humanistic in its perspective than mine, arguing that '[a]lthough new technologies can provide new sources of agency, they are still structured through human relations' (O'Riordan 2001: 232). These views are limited in their capacity for seeing the game as a space for its own vibrancy (see, for example, Bennett 2010), or for

a posthuman view of technology being what constitutes us. However, one of O'Riordan's (2001: 237) most pertinent points is the claim that cyberspace and game space are 'changing the ways we conceptualize separate domains of self and other'. She therefore states that 'different theoretical constructions are required to analyse, rather than observe, the collapses which are occurring' (O'Riordan 2001: 237).

Following this call for different theoretical constructions, posthumanism is a theory worth utilising in place of cyborgian constructions of avatar and gamer, as it extends the acknowledgement of a "hybrid form" into a philosophical reimagining of what it is to be human. Conceiving of the technologically enhanced human as a cyborg seems to focus on the "extension" of the human. Posthumanism, on the other hand, suggests that the idea of an "unextended" human, stable and distinct in its own independent, individuality, was always incorrect, inadequate, and misleading (Braidotti 2013). Consequently, rather than viewing technology as an enhancement to the human, we can conceptualise the relationship between biology and technology as a "relational ontology". Relational ontology, as suggested by Barad (2007: 93):

> does not take the boundaries of any of the objects or subjects of these studies for granted but rather investigates the material-discursive boundary-making practices that produce "objects" and "subjects" and other differences out of, and in terms of, a changing relationality.

Such a relationality implies a more rhizomatic relationship between human and machine, as each is dependent on the other in order to emerge as an entity, rather than one being seen as superior. But how can we adopt a method to explore this relationship in a way that accounts for this rhizomatic understanding?

Game research methods

Without wanting to repeat too much of Chapter 2: Proposing the Posthuman Gamer, this chapter draws on game studies but with a particular view to analysing how this field has used research methods. Games have been studied in a multitude of different

ways from many perspectives and for various purposes, and accordingly a variety of different research methods have been employed. In his 2003 paper, 'Playing Research: Methodological approaches to game analysis', Aarseth identified three different approaches to games research, emphasising either gameplay (focussing on the sociological or ethnological), game-rules (associated more closely with game design or computer science), or the gameworld (considering aesthetics, history or economics). Throughout his paper he considers where or what the method is in game research (Aarseth 2003). He goes on to list the potential ways that games could be researched, from speaking to developers, to observing others at play (Aarseth 2003).

More "textual" analyses – surveying the game itself rather than its players – have demonstrated critical media mis-representations that are re-enforced in certain videogames, from racism (e.g. Poor 2012; Nakamura 2009) to sexism (e.g. Corneliussen 2011). Other research projects have explored aspects of the construction of time and space and experiences of temporality (e.g. Juul 2005; Aarseth 2011; Ash 2012b), as well as the formal logic of games as their own corporate ideologies based on work and reward systems (e.g. Rettberg 2011). Elsewhere, interviews with gamers have been used in the past to tell us much about their social attachment to gaming communities and their relationships with their avatars (e.g. O'Connor et al. 2015; Banks and Bowman 2016; Banks 2015).

There have been interesting developments in our understanding of the demographic of gamers and the games that they play, and web based forum discussions, survey responses and game-based websites have all been analysed to explore how this links to offline interpretations of the "gamer" identity (e.g. Bergstrom et al. 2014; Baxter-Webb 2014). As persistent and individualised game spaces (Wolf and Perron 2003: 11), MMORPGs have expanded the possibilities for game research, considering how online, game-based relationships are formed and how communities and relationships persist outside of the gamespace (e.g. Taylor 2006) or in alternate gamespaces when their own have been disrupted (e.g. Pearce and Artemesia 2009); and the appeal of gameworlds for marginalised "others" to find spaces to express themselves through performances of gender and sexuality (e.g. Eklund 2011; Pulos 2013). Fan studies has contributed to the debate, considering, for example, the motivation behind fans' machinima creations (e.g. Lowood and Nitsche 2011).

The specificities of the avatar-gamer relationship have also been explored from a variety of angles, often through one-on-one interviews and qualitative analysis. Cote and Raz (2015) argue that as videogames are interactive, interviews can provide insight into their meaning and significance to players. As they explain, in-depth interviews are suitable for gaining detailed, personal insight rather than "representative" or generalizable data (Cote and Raz 2015: 93). Furthermore, one-on-one interviews in games research can allow for co-constructions between participant and researcher, where the researcher enters into a dialogue with their participants and an analysis develops through a reciprocal exchange of information and understanding (Cote and Raz 2015).

However, Cote and Raz (2015: 95) highlight the problem I have with the suitability of this method for my own research project, when they state that in-depth interviews might be weak at exploring certain topics. Because in-depth interviews rely on the ability for participants to think through and verbalise their answers, a research project on posthuman subjectivities may not be particularly accessible. When exploring how posthuman subjectivities are facilitated, some understanding of this terminology, philosophy, and the associated implications is necessary. For instance, questions such as "what makes you feel close with your avatar?" are too vague to construct a particular argument for a *posthuman* subjectivity. If participant answers were to be analysed in this way my concern would be that this would be an imposition of ideas on the research participant, which seems somewhat unethical as they may instead see their relationship with their avatar as humanist and hierarchical. Some methods suggest other ways of engaging participants in the co-production of their analysis. Member checking involves returning to the participant with the analysis of their interview for them to comment on (Morgan 1997). Stimulated recall would involve recording gamers gameplay and asking them to comment on their actions and thoughts as they watch the footage back (linked to game play research by Pitkänen 2015). However, neither of these methods would seem to provide much benefit for my particular research questions as this may lead to more of a contradiction within the research proposal than a "validation". For example, if I were to suggest an analysis that demonstrated a rhizomatic relationality, but the participant disagreed with this and felt themselves to be very much "in control" of their avatar this would create further tension in the research. Much of this stems from the fact

that our feelings of attachment, subjectivity, or even of our own "posthumanity", are so subjective that the questions asked of focus groups or even of individuals may not capture the essence or feeling that is being explored. This is further complicated by the traditionally humanistic societies that we are a part of, where much of what we are taught aligns more readily with notions of a liberal human subject than an emergent posthumanism. Although such tensions could have been accounted for with further commentary and analysis, ultimately these forms of data collection seemed to move me away from the lived experience of posthuman subjectivity and how feelings of entanglement emerged through different affective experiences.

For these reasons, more intuitive methods of research practice were much more practical and viable for my own project as they were the only methods that enabled me to embrace my subjective experience. Ethnography as a method of participant observation has been highly effective in a range of game research exploring online communities and player experience (see, for example, Pearce and Artemesia 2009; Taylor 2006; Nardi 2010; Boellstorff 2008). In these studies, researchers "immerse" themselves in the online community or game that is at study, and draw on their own experiences reflexively to contribute to their research data and share further insight to the experiences of the gameworld. However, there is again a disjuncture here between my own research questions and this method. How does one observe another's posthuman subjectivity? In the gameworld I would only see the avatar and the environment. But even in the physical world – were I to visit players' own environments and watch them play – I would still only be getting partial fragments of what was occurring between the interaction of "human" and "machine"[14]. As Aarseth (2003) explains, if we are merely outwardly observing others at play we are liable to miss out on much of the mental (and, indeed, physical) interpretation of the game: for example, which parts of the game the gamer might ignore, and which are the most pertinent to them.

[14] This is not to say that interesting and useful data cannot be gathered through observing media usage. There have been research projects involving audience ethnographies in television studies that have used the method of "text-in-action" i.e. of watching a participant watch a TV programme and discussing it. These studies have been used to explore the role of media in terms of referential viewing in order to understand how participants then make sense of these programmes as being significant to their lives (see, for example, Wood 2005).

Ultimately, I do not feel that either interviews or observational data would have matched the ontological *or* epistemological standpoint of my research, as I will now explain. To explore posthuman subjectivity means accepting the key philosophical arguments of posthumanism. Although I would argue that we are all posthuman, to impose a posthumanist reading onto the words of others who may not feel the same seems, to me, somewhat unethical. There is a tension here in the research project – I do not want to create a posthumanism that is either elitist or abstract, but equally it is a topic difficult to explore through questioning others in order to "identify" posthuman subjectivity, especially if they do not have the academic framework to make sense of the self as posthuman. Moreover, whilst I believe knowledge is informed by experience, and therefore both participant and researcher experience can count as data, it is again very hard to "capture" the experience of posthuman subjectivity. As the aim of this thesis was to consider how posthuman subjectivity emerges and is experienced this was not something I felt I could search for in others. Instead, I decided to draw on the experience of those digital ethnographers who had gone before me (Pearce and Artemesia 2009; Taylor 2006; Nardi 2010; Boellstorff 2008 etc.), who had incorporated their own participation alongside their observation of others. However, rather than using my own experience in addition to more "traditional" research methods I instead decided to embed myself fully in the research data and undertake an autoethnography.

Autoethnography

My background is in performance studies and drama, and as such my experience is based predominantly in the ways in which I can use myself: my body, my emotions, my experiences. The accompanying written component to my previous studies was based in critical reflective portfolios, encouraging not just a use of "self" but an analytical engagement with "self". Moving to doctoral study, the idea of using my experiences was therefore one that I felt comfortable with. Consequently, I was drawn to autoethnography as a way of exploring the subjective experience of "being posthuman". As Gruppetta (2004: 7) states, in certain forms of research involving participant "others" 'we search for the epiphanies of our subjects but fail to acknowledge our own'. I believe that using the "self" to study lived experience is a valuable way of gaining

subjective insight. As stated above, this methodology is one that fits with both my ontological and epistemological standpoint: I believe that there are posthuman subjectivities, and therefore engage in the 'posthuman refusal of the ontological primacy of human existence' (Ferrando 2012: 10). The avatar-gamer is one way of exploring this. I do so by drawing on an aspect of my own posthuman embodiment, something that is nevertheless informed by 'non-human experience as site of knowledge' (Ferrando 2012: 10[15]) through the incorporation of the avatar and game, thereby constructing knowledge that is based in posthuman experience[16].

What is autoethnography?

Ellis et al. (2010: n.p.n.) position autoethnography as 'one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist'. In autoethnographies the writer/researcher is therefore used as a tool, 'as an object of description, analysis, and/or interpretation' (Chang 2008: 35), and so it is my (entangled) experiences that form the data of this work. Ellis et al. (2010: n.p.n.) state that a reflexive ethnography aims to describe the ways in which a deep immersion in a particular cultural context affects the researcher, facilitating articulation and understanding of the impact of environment on being, by acknowledging personal experience as a valid form of data collection and interpretation. As such, autoethnographies are often linked to phenomenology and are about bringing personal lived experience, rigorous cultural analysis and emotive forms of representation together in research in order to create accessible texts that provide 'evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience' (Ellis et al. 2010: n.p.n.). For my part, I do not use phenomenology as this could be argued to be a very anthropocentric and humanist philosophy (although post-phenomenology is developing as a field to counteract this focus). However, I am using the techniques of autoethnography to explore my intimate and affective engagement with a gameworld and with a specific

[15] Ferrando (2012: 10) links this to a 'posthuman epistemology'.
[16] See also Blackman (2015: 25) who suggests that 'methodological sensitivity is not an entirely human affair, and requires many eyes and ears – human and nonhuman – which can work with traces, gaps, absences, submerged narratives, and displaced actors in order to shape a form of mediated perception'.

avatar. Analysing this by drawing on literature from posthumanism has demonstrated how this practice can be seen to constitute one embodiment of posthuman subjectivity. This therefore utilises my (entangled) experiences but applies them to a broader field of study.

The purpose of a methodology that examines subjective lived experience is the hope or belief that 'one's own experiences are also the possible experiences of others' (Van Manen 1990: 54). An autoethnography would therefore have the potential to be 'simultaneously highly personal and yet also, […] highly generic' (Ihde 2002: xviii), thereby making it possible for a lived experience written by one person to have the ability to resonate with another and to 'shed light on another's world' (Kozel 2007: 24). This resonance and relevance is of utmost importance in my hopes for a thesis that uses posthumanism as a useful, meaningful, "everyday" example of how philosophy is applicable in explaining and exploring the ways in which we live.

All research projects fail to fully "capture" lived experience as they necessarily transform it (Denzin 1992: 20), however forms of reflexive writing often 'construct first-person stories rather than trying to maintain the conventions of impersonal, academic argumentation and persuasion' (Dicks et al. 2005: 34). Ellis and Bochner (2000: 747) argue that this allows us to write more directly, from the source of our own experience in narrative, poetic, and evocative ways. As Clough (2010: 16) writes:

> autoethnography has remained one of the most common responses to the criticism of ethnographic writing; its aim is to give a personal accounting of the location of the observer, which is typically disavowed in traditional social science writing, traditional ethnography especially. It does this by making the ethnographer the subject-object of observation, exploring experience from the inside of the ethnographer's life, emphasizing emotions or feelings.

Further to drawing on the researcher's own experiences, autoethnographies often take a more narrative form, as this can be seen to be an appropriate method of communicating cultural experience as it is through narrative that we understand our own lives (MacIntyre 1984: 212 cited in Ellis and Bochner 1992: 97; see also Polkinghorne 1991).

In this way the writing style can also hope to reach a wider audience than conventional scholarly research and engage readers emotionally. As Paasonen et al. (2015: 12) discuss, personal writing can overcome some of the boundaries that scholarly, academic texts might induce, including a sense of detachment and passivity[17]. Incorporating visceral experiences therefore becomes a negotiation between the embodied and semantic (Paasonen et al. 2015: 12).

An example of work that explores the negotiation between academic and intimate writing can be seen in Rambo Ronai's (1992) layered account *The Reflexive Self Through Narrative: A Night in the Life of an Erotic Dancer/Researcher*. This highly engaging piece of writing documents the researcher's experience of erotic dancing and negotiates her feelings as both a dancer and a researcher, moving from empowerment, to disgust, to detachment, to analysis. Her writing style switches between description and analysis and is highly affective in terms of drawing the reader into the research in a way that is accessible.

In my own use of autoethnography I do not employ a fully narrative style, as I instead embed my fieldnotes within a more traditional frame of analysis and discussion in order to explore the posthuman subjectivity that the fieldnotes embody. In these sections the academic voice allows me to articulate a range of critical and conceptual ideas in more depth (see To 2015: 71 for a similar argument). In this regard the research again attempts to negotiate the potential tension between an accessible text and an academic critique, however as per Ferreday (2009: 31) 'my response to theoretical work is also affective'. The analytical passages are therefore as affectively-driven as the data collection: each respond and react to something that has moved me in some way, whether that is from playing the game or reading and writing theoretical insights. Moreover, I do draw on Rambo Ronai's (1992) writing style as my fieldnotes themselves also move between different positions of researcher, gamer, analyser etc.

[17] It is worth noting that there is a history of thinkers, including Benjamin, Brecht and Adorno, to name just a few, who would argue that it is in fact accessible, linear narrative forms of culture that produce passivity, and that more difficult, fragmented forms of expression are needed to jolt audiences out of this detachment (Stevenson 2014: 318-320). Nevertheless, my own opinion is that these critically alienating texts can serve to baffle and bore audiences who may feel put off by their academic exclusivity, and that more accessible texts appeal to a wider audience.

and thus a fluid subjectivity is demonstrated throughout (I expand on this further in the below sections "I, posthuman", and "Practical application").

Historically, autoethnography follows ethnography as a reaction to "objective" research. Previous forms of knowledge production had relied heavily on a hierarchical understanding of subject positions and forms of knowledge production. These sought to produce a singular understanding of complex and subjective issues, and relied on a significant power imbalance between the "researcher" and the "researched" (for further critiques of this perspective see, for example, Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009; Denzin 2009; Law 2004; Back and Puwar 2012). The "crisis of representation" refers to the realisation that a researcher's output as an "objective" and "factual" documentation – or representation – was problematic given the standpoints, biases, and subjectivity that each researcher brings to their project (see, for example, Denzin and Lincoln 2011: 3; Tracy 2013: 253). In this climate, the notion of one single factual truth became a tenuous one, opening up space to ask questions of who represents who, and the notion of the authorly self (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009). This 'postmodern scepticism regarding generalization of knowledge claims' encouraged an 'increased focus on emotion in the social sciences' (Anderson 2006: 373). In response to this, different forms of writing arose which embraced the necessary subjectivity and partiality of knowledge (Tracy 2013: 253). Accordingly, there has been a rise in reflexivity in research and an acknowledgement of the researcher's position of power in conducting, analysing and constructing her research (Ellis et al. 2010 and Davies 1999: 4). This is important in order to account for ways in which the researcher's subject position and situated knowledge (see Haraway 1988) may, consciously or unconsciously, affect the conclusions that they draw from their research.

Ellis and Bochner are seen as pioneers in the field of autoethnography (Chang et al. 2012: 19). Their (often co-authored) work on personal narratives and autoethnography has spanned over two decades and they have emphasised the need for evocative and reflexive work (Bochner and Ellis 2016), drawing on their own experiences of, for example, the loss of loved ones (Ellis 1995), and having an abortion (Ellis and Bochner 1992), to more recent work that has explored autoethnographic vignettes of sleeping (Ellis 2016). This range of work alone hints towards the uptake of

autoethnography into different fields, moving away from exclusively confessional tales or extremely personal narratives of taboo topics, into more "mundane" and everyday experiences.

As previously mentioned, ethnographies in games or virtual worlds have risen in the past decade, and subjective participation in games has been widely acknowledged as an appropriate method of complementing the study of games and gamers (see, for example, Lammes 2007; Aarseth 2003; Cote and Raz 2015; Pearce and Artemesia 2009 to name a few)[18]. As Aarseth (2003: n.p.n.) states:

> [i]f we have not experienced the game personally, we are liable to commit severe misunderstandings, even if we study the mechanics and try our best to guess at their workings. And unlike studies of films and literature, merely observing the action will not put us in the role of the audience.

Aarseth (2003: n.p.n.) goes on to explain that: '[w]hen others play, what takes place on the screen is only partly representative of what the player experiences'. An example of this from my own gameplay can be seen in my fieldnotes where I discuss holding my breath whilst my avatar is underwater. Holding my breath was an essential part of the analysis of that subjective experience – but is something that could have easily gone unnoticed by an external observer.

Despite the recognition of the subjective insights researcher gameplay can provide, there have been far fewer fully autoethnographic explorations in game than their ethnographic counterparts[19]. Sundén's work in *World of Warcraft* is a notable example, and one that I draw inspiration from. As Sundén (2012: 165) writes: '[g]ames have a tendency to wind up the body – to rush its heart, to sharpen its senses, and to speed up its reflexes,' but she argues that there is a gap in the research of this actually

[18] Whilst Crawford et al. (2011: 284-286) are critical of placing too much emphasis on lived experience this is more a response to the potential "privileging" of the game or gameplay in the field of game studies overall, which they feel may lead to gaps in the field. For my own research project, it is *necessary* that I "privilege" gameplay as it is the relationship and emergent subjectivity between "human" and "machine" that is being studied.

[19] As opposed to a reflexive ethnography where researcher experience is drawn on but is not the main method of data collection.

being acknowledged – a gap she seeks to address. She believes 'there appears to be something of a glitch in the translation from ontology to epistemology in the research of digital games' (Sundén 2012: 165), as although games are understood to be embodied and sensuous, there is little methodological acknowledgement of the place of the researcher's own embodied and sensing experience. In justifying her methodological approach and use of autoethnography, Sundén (2012: 176) says: 'I ask myself whether this experience changed me in a way that significantly affected how I understood the field. It did'.

It seems unlikely that anyone who places themselves as part of the research topic, anyone who uses themselves as a "tool" in their methodology, will be unaffected, their views unchanged to the culture, or phenomenon under scrutiny. In my own time gaming I have been surprised by my connection with my avatar, how at times her pre-programmed voice which reprimands me (usually when I am trying to cram too many items into an already full bag) jolts me and disrupts my sense of me/we/her/us when her agency is seemingly taken away from me in those words. My own project seeks to follow Sundén's (2012: 170) example by asserting that whilst informants may tell the researcher of their experiences, '*[m]y story is not qualitatively different*' (my emphasis), and is therefore just as valuable a source of knowledge production as any other.

Nevertheless, there are certain issues arising from using an autoethnographic approach, and it has been criticised as a method for being overly emotional, or for manipulating narrative truth (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 745). However, whether writing and researching based on our own experience or that of participant others, all accounts and descriptions will fail to fully capture "raw" or lived experience. This is because all recollections, reflections, description, interviews or conversations – indeed all 'research' – are 'already transformations of those experiences' (Van Manen 1990: 54). Ellis and Bochner (2000: 745) state that all of the stories we tell are always at risk of "distorting" the past. Autoethnographies, therefore, are less concerned with whether they convey *narrative truth* (in terms of exactly chronicling events as they unfolded) than whether they convey the feelings and experiences of those events in an evocative way. I suggest that by using my (entangled) experiences and writing about those I am able to do my best to ensure that the writing portrays an account of the experience that

resonates in some way with others. It could also be argued that the inclusion of others as my dataset would only involve further distance between the data and the reader, and that further transformation might occur through the interpretation – between myself and my participants and then between my words and my readers – without the ability for reflexive engagement with the conclusions drawn from the engagement with the text.

This is precisely why a first-person method, or an autoethnography, might be preferential, as '[m]y own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's are' (Van Manen 1990: 54). Therefore, the transformation or mediation that experiences must necessary go through in order to become written texts will only be once removed from the experience through the work of the researcher, whereas when using others experiences they are already further removed from the source. Indeed, certain qualitative research methods would suggest that if the research project uses participants, after the researcher has analysed the initial data they should return to their participants to validate the understanding or conclusions drawn, the process of member checking previously mentioned (Morgan 1997; Savin-Baden and Major 2012: 477). In an autoethnography this is already implicit within the method – you are constantly reworking your own words and reinterpreting your own data.

That said, our access to our own experience could be problematised and critiqued in various ways: first by our reliance on memory; and second because of the transformative effects of our reflection. Chang (2008: 72) claims that memory 'often reveals partial truth and is sometimes unreliable […] Memory selects, shapes, limits, and distorts the past'. However, Ellis and Bochner (2000) would argue against the notion of distortion as being problematic. Instead, memory is viewed as a process of us trying to make sense of our lives through the narrative form (see Chapter 7: Emergent Subject Positions for the posthumanising of memory). Furthermore, all forms of research rely on some form of interpretation, and to denote one as "right" and another as "wrong" seems entirely subjective. Nevertheless, keeping detailed self-reflexive fieldnotes is recommended by Chang (2008: 89) in order to capture 'behaviours, thoughts, emotions, and interactions as they occur […] to preserve vivid details and fresh perspectives'. The process of thinking, and indeed writing, about our "immediate experience" can alter it. Having these initially preserved perspectives in fieldnotes allows us to become more critically aware of the transformations, and examine how and

why these might have occurred. This is not to say that the process of thinking and writing about our experiences necessarily transforms the experience in an "untruthful" way – as Richardson (2005: 961-962) states: '[e]xperience and memory are, […] open to contradictory interpretations governed by social interests and prevailing discourses'. Ellis (2004: 117) also makes a pertinent point, that 'all memory takes place in the present and is oriented toward the future. My current frames of memory – and my need to have a coherent sense of myself – influenced what I remembered and what the memories mean to me'. As such we might consider "true memory" to be a humanist notion that aids in the construction of a "rational" self – something which this thesis critiques, and which I explore in more depth below (see the section I, posthuman below).

It is also important that in an autoethnography there is a constant engagement with the text as it is being written. Interpretations are never complete or finite, but by engaging with our analysis multiple times over the course of a research period we can hope to add new thoughts to our prior conclusions. In this way, Lather (2007: 126) suggests we can contrast the notion of objectivity instead with 'explicit incompleteness, tentativeness, the creation of space for others to enter, the joining of partial voices. Authority then comes from engagement and self-reflexivity, not distanced "objectivity"'. This allows us to 'to tell and retell' our analyses, and accordingly '[t]here is no such thing as "getting it right" only "getting it" differently contoured and nuanced' (Richardson 2005: 962).

Autoethnography's focus on highly subjective, personal, emotional and embodied forms of knowledge production has aligned it as an "affective" methodology (see, for example, To 2015), and I explore this aspect of my methodology in more depth below.

Accounting for affect

Affect is defined variously as force; intensity; being moved; excess; viscerality; before emotion; beyond emotion; and exchange (for more discussion of affect see Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Wetherell 2012; Blackman 2012; Paasonen et al. 2015). However, it has also been defined as ordinary (Stewart 2007), and has moved toward the exploration

boredom and inertia (Petit 2015). Despite differing viewpoints, most would agree that the "turn to affect" in academia has signified a shift in focus to account for embodiment and feeling, and to counteract a focus on the discursive (Wetherell 2012: 19). Paasonen et al. (2015: 4) suggest that various turns toward the material and somatic have extended 'theoretical investigations to the embodied, the sensory, and the lively in ways that question the anthropocentrisms of earlier intellectual inquiry'. The intensities we experience in our physical being have been, at times through the history of philosophy, neglected in favour of the (humanistic) rational mind and a focus on language as the main way of knowing about the world (see Wetherell 2012; Paasonen et al. 2015). However, through a series of near simultaneous realisations or theorisations, "the body" is gradually coming back into play. Gregg and Seigworth (2010: 6-8) list eight different potential orientations that have led us to a concentration on affect, from phenomenology (see, for example, Ihde 2002); to explicitly feminist work (see, for example, Braidotti 2013); to 'contagions of feeling, [and] matters of belonging' (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 8; see, for example, Blackman 2012 and Ferreday 2009). Through these approaches, affect has enabled a focus on the body and has been seen as a turn that is able combat the predominance of the discursive, the sense-making and the rational. By acknowledging affect, we take our attention back to the body, to things that are visceral and that move us. In my own research, recognising affect in gaming is of utmost importance as I rely on exploring the embodied feelings in gameplay, and investigating how the interaction between human and machine is felt emotionally, cognitively, and physically.

But what use is it to research such ways of *being* if we then only reduce this to words? Why the "affective turn" when we then turn promptly back to language and linguistic? How can we represent affect in our research only through words? This is something that everyone who researches affect must contend with, and is a dilemma that is being thoughtfully negotiated by many scholars in various fields (see, for example, Knudsen and Stage 2015 for a range of approaches from the humanities and the social sciences, exploring affective environments from nightclubs to heritage spaces). For this project, I am convinced that autoethnography is a suitable methodology despite its reliance on the written word precisely because words too are affective: '[w]riting itself is an affect-laden process: driven by interest and desire,

subject to frustration and misery as well as productive of joy and excitement' (Gibbs 2015: 223). Whilst words may not be able to *capture* how we feel, what we shouldn't downplay is their ability to function as part of the subject formation itself, and to *convey* what we mean and, as I explore further below, to form our understanding of our experiences.

I am concerned by the way in which the turn to affect 'means turning away from something else', and agree that 'this may, depending on the degree of the turn, lead to the rhetorical dismissal of existing forms of thought' (Paasonen et al. 2015: 5) rather than critically engaging with them. Instead, my fieldnotes demonstrate not only an attempt at conveying my physical, visceral reactions, but also the ways in which I immediately begin to make sense of those, and incorporate those feelings into the narrative that I construct on the page.

The content of the notes do not only work through physical feelings and emotions. They also begin to analyse and try to make sense of the experience organically, without waiting for a separate "analysis" research phase. I view writing as 'an act of mediation where bodily impressions, modulations, arousals, and motions are translated in order to be brought into the representational space of the text' (Paasonen et al. 2015: 12) – although I consider the written document as something which not only represents, but performs, as I explore in more depth below.

The act of writing necessarily changes the "thing" which we are describing. To not do this would be to artificially separate affect:

> [i]t is a mistake to try to remove pre-conscious visceral perception from its usual and habitual world/brain/body/mind contexts, and to artificially freeze and isolate affect as a separate element from the dynamically integrated sequences in which these things normally operate. No easy distinction can be made between visceral and cultural meaning-making, and why should we make one – where is the advantage? (Wetherell 2012: 67)[20]

[20] Whilst Wetherell's (2012: 3) account criticises the overgeneralisation of affect such that she believes certain theory 'slides over distinctions between human and non-human' affect, her work has nevertheless been useful to me in considering the negotiation between affect and discourse.

What Wetherell is saying here makes sense in the context of my own fieldnotes, which are not separate from theorisation and analysis themselves. There are often moments where in a single fieldnote I will make an account of an affective, visceral feeling, and automatically try to make sense of it, contextualise it, and justify it. As Kozel (2007: 9) states: 'reflection is not only a secondary process or a commentary on experience, but also the process of thinking that transforms the doing. […] Thought impacts experience just as experience impacts thought'. The writing of the fieldnotes automatically seeks to make sense of the experience: 'I reflect and start typing, and the reflection is already replaced by the typing experience' (Rambo Ronai 1992: 104). Several of my accounts go through description of the experience to a rationalising and reasoning of it, to a probe about such motivations, or, at times, a self-conscious dismissal of them – laughing at or critiquing my own responses as it becomes apparent through interrogation that the reasoning behind them is in some way "inadequate" or "flawed". The automaticity of our compulsion to make sense of our experience is nearly inescapable – and therefore to separate an affective account from that would be as much of a transformation of the experience as writing it is. Because of the ways in which this accounting for oneself (to borrow Butler's 2005 title), one's actions or one's experiences can be seen to "do" something through the change that occurs in the "self", some theorists have considered 'autobiographical telling as a performative act' (Smith and Watson 2001: 47, see also Butler 2005). As per Wetherell (2012: 68):

> [t]here are several ways in which emotives [first-person speech acts] are performative. First, they have what Reddy describes as self-exploring and self-altering effects. An utterance like "I feel angry" can be a moment of crystallisation. A range of confused, often fugitive, mental flowerings become formulated and labelled. This process of description changes the state being described in subtle or very obvious ways. It reflexively acts back and reconstitutes the experience as a certain kind. The moment of description in mental life alters what it describes. […] performatively reconfiguring affective experience.

Whilst some might argue that the performative writing of an affective experience distorts the affective experience itself and fails to "capture affect", what we should also consider is that, turning to Barad (2007: 55), 'these sets of practices are complexly entangled in ways that representationalist views of science (which treat theory and experiment as separate domains with one or the other as dominant and primary) elide'. We need to make sure that in attempting to account for something visceral we do not continue to dichotomise body and mind – however this is as important in terms of avoiding a reversal of the dichotomy to instead privilege the body over the mind by disavowing the written word.

As Paasonen et al. (2015: 4) explain, many affect theorists believe that text has constrained analysis and downplayed the sensory. However, in the turn to affect, why do we decide then that language is a "lesser" form? As Wetherell (2012: 62) states: '[b]rain/body responses are autonomous only in the most limited senses and for all intents and purposes cannot be meaningfully separated from the rest of the assemblage that includes cultural, cognitive and conscious elements'. As such, in the turn to affect and the refusal of Cartesian dualism we need to be careful that we do not fall foul of recreating the same problem – maintaining the dualism but asserting the body, or affect, as the superior aspect with the mind, or the discursive or linguistic being reduced to an afterthought – deemed ill-suited for study and instead privileging 'the non-conscious and the non-representational' (Wetherell 2012: 53). As per Wetherell (2012: 19) '[t]his again seems as wrong turn'. She continues, '[f]or many, discourse is seen as a *taming* affect, codifying its generative force […]. On the contrary, I shall argue that it is the discursive that very frequently makes affect powerful, makes it radical and provides the means for affect to travel' (Wetherell 2012: 19). In my fieldnotes I therefore aim to use affective writing to make the experiences in game accessible to the reader in order to provide a visceral insight into "feeling posthuman".

I argue that the writing of the affective and the use of the "I" are in fact the most advantageous and useful ways of researching the lived experience of posthuman subjectivity. Any separation is artificial, but the discursive can make affect travel (Wetherell 2012; see Ahmed 2014: 12-15 for a similar argument, where she argues that

'words are not simply cut off from bodies, or other signs of life'). In this way, then, considering the written component of autoethnography as both echoing life in its attempt to make meaning from experience, and as a potential mode of travel for affect, I would suggest that the role of my fieldnotes is to demonstrate affective meaning-making and to make that feeling travel by affecting the reader. In this regard I agree with Ferreday (2009: 52 and 54) that 'reading is affective' and is not 'a "second best" activity that is distinct from and inferior to "real life"'. As Rambo Ronai (1992: 104) says, '[i]t is my hope that readers will live their own experience while reading about mine and have an understanding of my lived experience as a result', and my aim is the same.

The fieldnotes do not attempt to fully "tame" affect, or isolate it from its environment. Instead they serve a different, dynamic role in their ability to convey the experience through affecting the reader through words – as Paasonen et al. (2015: 11) write: 'authors try to grasp and convey some of [affects] elusive yet visceral intensity'. I aim to use descriptive language in my fieldnotes in order to convey the environment, atmosphere, reaction, or emotion that I am in or experiencing, using creative words and imagery to convey some sense of what I am experiencing even for someone who has not done or experienced that thing before. To argue that such a thing is impossible is to deny the whole affective sphere of literature, which has moved us to laughter, tears, shock and outrage, long before videogames. As Ferreday (2009: 54) argues, texts 'produce strong affective responses that draw the reader in'.

A further way in which affective writing aims to convey visceral emotions is through locating them in embodied experience. Kyrölä (2014: 5) writes of using 'autobiographical accounts of my own viewing and analyzing experiences – in other words, a strategic "I" – as a resource for grounding the analysis at the intersection of the cultural and the personal'. This is both validation for the use of autobiographical experiences as well as justification for the use of embodied experiences to explore affective engagements. However, whilst Paasonen et al. (2015: 12) argue that the use of first person stories is particularly suited to affective work in order to ground and situate affective experiences to avoid overgeneralisation, there remain issues with the incorporation of the personal. Smith and Watson (2001: 1) trouble the notion that writing about our own lives is simple, by pointing out that in the act of writing we

become both ‘the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation’. Their book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* goes on to point out that:

> there is no coherent “self” that predates stories about identity, about “who” one is. Nor is there a unified, stable immutable self that can remember everything that has happened in the past. […] the narrating “I” is neither unified nor stable. It is split, fragmented, provisional, multiple, a subject always in the process of coming together and of dispersing (Smith and Watson 2001: 47 and 60).

Whilst this is an understandable claim I would suggest that just because an “I” is unstable and partial this does not make what this “I” has to say any less of a valid source of data. I would continue as Sundén (2012: 170) before me by using the “I” despite understanding this “I” as fractured and partial, rather than stable and whole. By acknowledging this partiality the research makes clear an epistemological uncertainty as ‘ways of knowing are shaky, partial, and always in the process of being proved otherwise’ (Sundén 2012: 171). However, I would suggest that this is, and can always be, the case. Our understanding is always incomplete, as is our knowledge. However, ‘[t]o know oneself as limited is still to know something about oneself, even if one’s knowing is afflicted by the limitation that one knows’ (Butler 2005: 46).

Autoethnography therefore has a complex position in terms of accounting for an “I”. As Grant et al. (2013: 8) explain, at times the voice associated with autoethnography can be aligned with positions including ‘modernism, realism, positivism, phenomenology, and at a broader sociocultural level liberal-humanism’. As such, an “I” might be assumed to speak with authority from a particular position on a subject, as ambiguity and complexity might be erased in a literal voice that assumes a stable and authoritative position (Grant et al. 2013: 8). To the contrary, Grant et al.’s (2013: 8) position is that autoethnographies should precisely account for the emergence of the “I”, as the writing of research demonstrates how subjectivity is produced. The voice is therefore ‘always provisional and contingent, always becoming’ (Grant et al. 2013: 8). These arguments are aligned with a more post-structuralist critique and

approach to autoethnography, but these arguments are extended further in my own aim of using a posthuman autoethnography.

I, posthuman

> *Rereading some of Herbrechter's (2013) book and I am struck again by the ways in which some people might take offence at my research topic and methodology. Some might find it a contradiction – to study posthumanism, the ways in which we are not "one", by using a method which is self indulgently concerned with "I". If I am not a fixed bounded subject, then from what position do I write an autoethnography?*
>
> *'The true nature of subjectivity as fragmented, contradictory and irreducible to conscious self-identity, ultimately remains unknowable' (Herbrechter 2013: 205).*
>
> *Perhaps though this juxtaposition is what is so necessary, and missing from current debate. What does this posthumanism look like, feel like, to the "human" subject? The inescapable "I" may be a fallacy but it is precisely that - inescapable.*
>
> *The "I" with which I write this thesis is an intended posthuman, an "I" which is not just "me" but Etyme too, bound up as we are together, in this world and that. It fluctuates and changes between her, me, we and us as those boundaries undergo their "continuous construction and reconstruction" as per Hayles (1999). I am writing my-her-our experiences.*

> 'Although I am writing this as a cyborg, I still suffer from that human frailty of a lack of objectivity, particularly when it is myself in the dock.' (Warwick 2002: viii)

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, there are various approaches to posthumanism, and these range from a transhumanist ideal of uploading the mind to the

computer (which in fact re-imposes a Cartesian dualism) to those from a more critical posthumanist perspective who believe the posthuman to be a fully embodied being. Some of the main aspects of posthumanism lie in its disavowal of previous ways of conceiving of the human, and with that come the liberal human aspects of autonomy, rationality, independent and control.

There are some versions of critical posthumanism that would extend this critique of the liberal human subject to argue that subjectivity is a problematic concept to theorise the posthuman condition through, as its roots are deeply embedded in humanism (see, for one discussion, Callus and Herbrechter 2012). Herbrechter (2012: 331) explains the potential pitfalls of autobiography in the following extract:

> [t]he very idea of autobiography relies on a subject (or a narrator) who is capable of remembering, interpreting and identifying with his or her life story. It is a very specific form of embodiment that usually conveys trust in the impression that the subject of the narration is identical to the subject of the narrative. This is, in fact, what guarantees self-sameness, that is an assurance that "I" *am* "me".

Herbrechter (2012: 331) goes on to enumerate the critiques of such a claim – ranging from blows against the self-conscious "I"; Freud's distrust of the "I" due to its influence from unconscious forces; Marx's critique of the subject as being manipulated by ideologies it is unaware of; and post-structuralism's "radicalisation" of 'these forms of suspicion, all directed against the idea that subjects are free and competent to give an accurate account of themselves'.

There are therefore various tensions involved in studying posthuman subjectivity using an autoethnographic methodology. For some, the idea of posthumanism as a movement, turn or philosophy which acknowledges the permeability or entanglement of humans, the ways in which they are constantly shaped by "external" forces and stimuli, including the environment, the non-human, and other people, means that the idea of the "I" is one which is precarious and therefore writing from that position autoethnographically seems contradictory. How can I speak of a

"me" when I know that "I" am only what my entanglements make "me"? These tensions add a necessary complication to be explored through my research.

It is my belief that none of us are the singular, bounded subjects that liberal humanism would ascribe us to. However, I do not believe it is possible at this stage to fully escape the overthrows of the long history of humanism that has shaped us (as entangled as I believe myself to be, I still speak of "I"). The "I" is the historical way in which humans have come to conceptualise themselves, 'the very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making' (Butler 2005: 21). Whilst this thesis proposes that we can critique that separateness from the "other" we cannot yet state that we operate without some sense of "self" appearing, even from the perspective that such a self emerges from an amalgamation of components that collide. As Butler (2005: 59) states: '[n]o one can live in a radically non-narratable world or survive a radically non-narratable life'. I am therefore suggesting that the "inescapable fallacy" of the I is indeed at this moment inescapable – it is, as Deleuze terms it, a 'grammatical fiction' (1991: 95) but one we need. This could be linked to Blackman's (2012: 23) exploration of 'how subjects [live] singularity in the face of multiplicity'. Rather than renouncing subjectivity entirely then, I aim to critically extend "subjectivity" in a posthuman fashion, by acknowledging the multiplicity of beings that contribute to "a" subjectivity at any given time.

It is therefore not my claim that this "I" from which I write is either stable or fixed (see Richardson 2005: 962), nor do I believe it to be free or in a position of power, nor do I even presume the assurance that the "I" is "me". The fieldnotes are not an accurate "representation" of the experience of gaming. Instead, I use the fieldnotes in a performative way as an emergence of the posthuman subject. In writing the fieldnotes I 'enact the self I am trying to describe' (Butler 2005: 66). It is therefore my intention to use the fieldnotes in a post-anthropocentric way *despite* their reliance on the "I", through demonstrating how that posthuman I is constructed of elements of both human and non-human. As per Butler (2005: 81):

> I am authored by what precedes and exceeds me […] This does not mean that I cannot speak of such matters, but only that when I do, I must be careful to

> understand the limits of what I can do, the limits that condition any and all such doing. In this sense, I must become critical.

Although "I" am more than "me" I do not feel this should exclude writing about the "self" – as long as I acknowledge that self as entangled[21]. I do not feel my material self to be a more influential factor than Etyme's informational self in the posthuman subjectivity that we become and that the fieldnotes partially (in their own fragmented way) embody. This aligns with recent calls for posthuman methodologies to cultivate a sensitivity to non-humans through a non-hierarchical approach – 'one should not assume that human beings are necessarily the most important actor in shaping what happens within an event or situation' (Ash and Gallacher 2015: 83). I explore these ideas in more depth below, whilst providing a more detailed consideration (and justification) of the complexity of aligning autoethnography with posthumanism.

In just the same way that my thesis will explore how very "human" feelings permeate the research into the posthuman subject constituted from and through the avatar-gamer; so too does my research method demonstrate the very "human" way of contextualising and understanding this – through the subjective experience of the I.

Whilst "I" am not only "I" but an amalgamation based on environments, atmospheres, bodies, societal, political, economic influences "I" still refer to myself as such. I am a posthuman-I, by my own admission and definition. Moreover, I embody a particularly "privileged" form of the posthuman. I write from the perspective of a Western, white, able-bodied, young, heterosexual, educated, female. The views presented in this thesis are therefore a subjective account from that particular perspective, and accordingly, somewhat inescapably, present an argument that speaks from the privileges associated with all of those facets of how I am positioned; I am entangled in many privileged contexts. There are fascinating ways of considering how the posthuman applies outside of all of my own contexts. For example, *Posthuman Bodies*, edited by Halberstam and Livingston (1995), presents various ways of using the

[21] See Herbrechter (2012) for his explanation of how autobiography can easily be extended to 'auto-hetero-techno-bio-graphy' in order to account for the incorporation of self, other, technology, life and writing. (He also includes "thanato" to account for writing as if one were already dead.)

posthuman to critique political and social positions. The importance of the accessibility of the posthuman should not be underestimated or undermined. Nonetheless, in embracing that accessibility it is also necessary to make the accounts of the privileged. This thesis is my attempt to contribute to a growing area of research in order that others might take these ideas, concepts, and approaches forward in ways that represent their own experiences and subjectivities.

'We experience the world from a single embodied perspective' (Roden 2015: 4) and I do not refer to myself as a collective nor do I disown the "I" I feel. To do so in my research would be, I believe, disingenuous, as it would suggest an approach that is not my own lived experience. More importantly, I doubt it to be the lived experience of any readers of this text. Although there are of course limitations, tensions, and difficulties with writing as a posthuman-I it is nevertheless a more accessible and altogether a more useful practice than to become overwhelmingly bound in the internal contradictions which it poses, which would ultimately fail to make any accessible reflection or intervention through the restrictions of not being able to say anything at all.

Furthermore, we should consider what point would it serve to attempt to depart from the "I" in this thesis? My research attempts to show an "everyday" posthuman subjectivity, taking a medium which is accessible to anyone with an adequate computer and internet connection,[22] and which is used, for many people, in an increasingly mundane, everyday, commonplace way (see Juul 2010, for discussion of the increasing "casuality" of gaming). The motivation behind this choice is to make theory more accessible and applicable to everyday life, to show how relevant posthumanism to our daily encounters. It is therefore imperative that my research method also follows this ethos, making the theory accessible by demonstrating the difficulties of accounting for ones "posthuman" self in a very "human" way. This methodology therefore arose from the kinds of questions I am asking in order to demonstrate the affective experience of both gaming and being entangled. As Crick (2011: 267) states, gaming is 'a fully embodied, sensuous, carnal activity' and I needed a method that would demonstrate

[22] Whilst full membership requires a paid for subscription, a trial version of *World of Warcraft* is accessible for free.

this, and allow room for the excitement, anxiety, fun and boredom that gaming incites, and posthuman subjectivity encompasses.

Whilst some might criticise my method for being self-indulgent and subjective, I believe it is just as problematic to write this position out of the research as I agree with claims that 'theory needs to be responsive to lived experience' (Ferreday 2013: 53). As Barad (2007: 55) states: '[t]o theorize is not to leave the material world behind and enter the domain of pure ideas where the lofty space of the mind makes objective reflection possible. Theorizing, like experimenting, is a material practice'. My theorising is inherently caught up in my material body and entangled self through the use of my own experience and through accounting for myself in the way that I subjectively do.

I am constantly being changed, affected, mediated, by those things – human and non-human – around me. As Butler (2005: 7) affirms: 'there is no "I" that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence'. Similarly, this thesis is not a piece which has been solely constructed by me – I am not the autonomous author – this writing is affected too, not only by me but by my supervisors, by my family, friends and any others who read this. It is affected by the reader, and their context, too, and is therefore never a singular thing. It is changed by what I have read and have not, by those writings and authors who have influenced me and those I disagree with. It is also affected by the spell check programme on Microsoft Word, by the synonym function, or by whatever Google suggests when I am struggling for a word and it throws something at me. Focussing on the intrinsically multi-layered context and style of this thesis throughout, however, would serve to disrupt the (constructed) narrative to such a degree that no – even partial, incomplete, subjective – conclusions could be drawn. Instead, I have chosen to present my research through a constructed and controlled piece, in the attempt to draw some conclusions – however provisional – to focus my research, and to explain *something* clearly rather than many things vaguely.

Barad (2007: 26) explains: 'our knowledge-making practices are social-material enactments that contribute to, and are a part of, the phenomena we describe'. What Barad means by this is that in order to provide meaning in the findings of research certain choices have to be made and that the choice of methods, in my case

autoethnography, is one of these, and as such effects the research outcome or results. This means that the research method is inherently bound up in the research results (see also Richardson 2005: 962). In this way, '[w]e do not uncover preexisting facts about independently existing things as they exist frozen in time like little statues positioned in the world. Rather, we learn about phenomena – about specific material configurations of the world's becoming' (Barad 2007: 90-91). My autoethnographic project aims to do this by exploring how intra-action emerges through gameplay.

To separate methods from results is flawed logic. Barad (2007: 118) argues that 'there is no unambiguous way to differentiate between the object and the agencies of observation: an apparatus must be introduced to resolve the ambiguity, but then the apparatus must be understood as part of what is being described'. Though this description is regarding quantum physics we can easily apply the same logic to my research project and argue that it is through the use of the autoethnography that my specific research findings arise, but also that the specific way in which I bring autoethnography and posthumanism together in fact aids the emergence of the posthuman subject which I discuss, create, am. The intra-action between the "method" (autoethnography) and the "object of study" (posthuman subjectivity) is an inseparable part of the way in which I make sense of that posthuman subject, and how the posthuman subjectivity emerges in this specific context. "Object" and "method" are therefore ontologically inseparable, only emerging from their intra-action with one another (Barad 2007: 128). Blackman (2015: 26-27) makes a similar argument to the effect that methods give form to processes that are otherwise dispersed and distributed, allowing them to be read and re-read through both human and technical means.

This understanding of the intra-action between object and apparatus then shows how the fieldnotes and the posthuman subject are a phenomena arising from the intra-action between autoethnography, "self", and avatar, thus acknowledging 'the researcher, instrument and researched to be active and entangled agents' (Van der Tuin 2014: 235). It is in this way that we could argue that bringing together two seemingly contrasting or contradictory ideas (autoethnography and posthumanism) actually gives rise to the "thing" itself – and that without using autoethnography the phenomena which I describe (the lived experience of MMORPG gaming as an embodiment of posthuman

subjectivity) would emerge in very different ways subject to the specificities of different entangled research methods.

Therefore, the fieldnotes demonstrate how they are a particular aspect of the posthuman-that-is-me. Etyme and I are inseparable in our intra-action and in the fieldnotes: they would not exist without my intra-action with her, and they do not speak only of the human side of our relationship. They present a narrative that occurs only as a result of myself and her intermingling. Pearce presents some of her research as co-authored between her avatar Artemesia and herself (see, for example, Pearce and Artemesia 2006 and 2009) in a way that is reflective of what occurs in my fieldnotes. The fieldnotes cannot escape the posthuman subject that they represent – or as Barad (2007) might argue, help to create. What I mean by this is that it is through the fieldnotes that my subjectivity with Etyme is made sense of and solidified, and so in some ways comes to be. As Gibbs (2015: 227) states: '[w]riting is inevitably a process in which subjectivity continually risks itself, finds itself, loses itself, and remakes itself in its dialogic relations with the worlds to which it attunes' and this aligns with the notion of the fieldnotes embodying the posthuman subjectivity that emerges from my intra-action with Etyme. We are lost and found through the fieldnotes, the specificities of our individuality are constructed in relation to one other just as the subjectivity we embody together emerges.

Clough has provided an account of the drawbacks within autoethnography from a posthuman angle, and her work poses some interesting points that are worth noting here. She cites Haraway's issues with ethnography evolving to include self-reflection and states that for Haraway self-reflection as a practice of rethinking is an inadequate methodology for the criticism of technoscience (Clough 2000: 15-16). Haraway instead proposes that this should instead be replaced by 'critical direct action' (Clough 2000: 15-16). My issue with this is that there is little help, guidance or indication of what such a "critical direct action" might look like – and, importantly, how one might begin to document such an action in a way other than writing. For example, it could be argued that my gaming is not only a 'practice of rethinking' but is in fact a 'critical direct action' which I take on semiotic(avatar)-material(embodied) "objects". However, as a doctoral candidate I still need to account for this experience in a way that is quantifiable by a panel of experts.

Clough (2000: 17) does make an understandable and founded critique of autoethnography, stating that where post-structuralism deconstructs the subject, autoethnography seems to insist on restoring it in order to voices own experiences and emotions and claim them as one's own. However, as I have stated, in my own methodological use of autoethnography this is not an uncomplicated use of the subject – in "voicing" in-game experiences through the fieldnotes I am not aiming to claim these experiences as my own, or at least not entirely my own. I instead use the fieldnotes as a space to explore the entangled entities that contribute to that experience, and any "restoration of subject" is instead a claim of, and for, the posthuman subject.

I therefore write as a flawed being, but in a way that is consistent to humanity's self-deception. Using Derrida's notion of autoaffection, Clough (2000: 17) writes:

> [i]t is autoaffection that allows the presumption of the unity of speech and precommunicated thought, giving the subject an inner presence, an inner voice, so that the subject, when it speaks, is presumed to speak its own voice, to speak its intention and to express its inner being.

My response to this for my own part is that my fieldnotes are presumed to speak something that is the posthuman subject's voice, the voice of that which is me and Etyme entangled and entwined – not more "me" or more "her", but both. Whilst Clough (2000: 17) states that 'autoaffection is crucial to any refusal of an intimacy between the body and the machine, nature and technology, the virtual and the real, the living and the inert' this is what my own autoethnography is trying to avoid. Rather than giving the "subject" an inner voice per se I am trying to give that particular "posthuman subjectivity" a voice, and precisely express the intimacy between body and the machine, the virtual and the real. It is also important to be self-critical of this claim, and to acknowledge the issue that the "voice" that is employed, whoever's it may be, cannot capture the experience and the intimacy, but nor can anything else. We therefore must accept that although the textual accounting for experience is not a wholly "accurate mirror" to the experience it is nevertheless an attempt to make those experiences accessible to others. In doing so I suggest that we use Barad's (2007) use of

performative rather than *representative* to account for the ways in which the writing of texts contribute to the "realisation" (or at least tangibility) of posthuman subjectivity, and that we utilise the power of words in ways that make them most useful and suitable for our purpose.

I might therefore conclude that my methodology is a *diffractive* one (Barad 2007: 46 onwards), which advocates moving away from representationality to performativity. This diffractive methodology focusses on 'performativity: subject and object do not preexist as such, but emerge through intra-actions; entangled ontology: material-discursive phenomena; onto-epistem-ology: knowing is a material practice of engagement as part of the world in its differential becoming' (Barad 2007: 89). These factors are epitomised in my research project through the posthuman – the subject emerges through the intra-action between avatar and gamer; the phenomena is materially embodied and discursively formed through the fieldnotes; and the methodology functions through a material engagement in gaming and a posthuman way of becoming. In this understanding, autoethnography is a critical practice of engagement, and the fieldnotes that I collect from my autoethnographic study do not only *represent* the posthuman but are a demonstration of the *performance* of posthuman subjectivity. Whilst I analyse the texts in what might be argued to be a more reflective way, I would nevertheless argue that this was only enabled through the initial engagement with the game that gave light to those experiences. The process of writing itself is entangled and engaged, and the analytical ideas that are framed around the fieldnotes in this thesis are therefore similarly critically working within the data.

A diffractive methodology displaces a focus on research as representational, as representation suggests an ontological difference between "representations" on the one hand and "the represented" on the other (Barad 2007: 46). In contrast, a performative approach disrupts the perceived independence of these "entities" (Barad 2007: 49). It instead focusses on what the practice or performance of "representing" actually produces, and takes into account that knowledge comes from directly and materially engaging with the world (Barad 2007: 49). This performative reading can be applied both to my analysis of my fieldnotes as well as my interpretation of Etyme. It is not my understanding that Etyme *represents* "me" as an 'ontologically separate entity' from the avatar. Rather, my inquiry is focussed on how a posthuman subjectivity emerges from

within the avatar-gamer intra-action. As such – following Barad (2007) again – my performative understanding occurs through my direct engagement with Etyme. As Barad (2007: 54, my emphasis) states: '*theorizing must be understood as an embodied practice*, rather than a spectator sport of matching linguistic representations to pre-existing things'. Thus the fieldnotes are a demonstration of how I have embodied the state of being a gamer, being posthuman. Furthermore, they actively constitute and give rise to a sense of solidarity in this way of being.

As I focus specifically on the avatar-gamer relationship in this research this could be seen to enact a "cut" in the research. Barad (2007: x) explains that 'entanglements are not isolated binary coproductions' and it is important to note that the posthuman subjectivity that I am discussing is constituted by more than just these two entities. This subjectivity is also formed by the gameworld, including the computer being played on, and the other gameplayers, to name just a few of the structures and components that feature in the entanglement. However, by focussing on the entanglement of these entities the research hopes to disrupt the humanist centrality of the author even whilst employing the "I", by demonstrating how that "I" is constructed and experienced in a permeable fluidity with a range of different external stimuli – and again this is referred to within the notes themselves, which move and change between reflection, documentation and analysis as they both describe and critique their descriptions. Most explicitly this construction is demonstrated through relationship with the avatar, but the ways in which the fieldnotes reference other media, affects, and emotions also plays its part. In this way the research project takes up recent calls for a rethinking of contemporary digital ethnography, that breakdown the author of research as all-knowing, and pays attention to the distribution of agency particularly in online cultures (Broekhuizen and Evans forthcoming). The accounts of this research are then posthuman not only in their disruption of human / non-human but also through their methodology in the disruption of researcher / research field.

Practical application

Whilst the above has outlined certain theoretical and methodological approaches to the use of autoethnography in a "virtual" world, I will now go on to explain the ways in

which this actually took place. As all researchers know, the process of data collection and organising is messy and subject to revision (Tracy 2013: 30). The below explains the process in a way that I hope is coherent, yet accounts for this messiness and demonstrates the overlaps in research phases.

The first "practical" aspect of undertaking this research project was deciding the game that the study would take place in. *World of Warcraft* has been running as an MMORPG for 12 years and over the course of its history it has expanded in various ways. One of the positives of using *World of Warcraft* is it has this rich history to draw on and was one of the first MMORPGs that was highly successful and popular, with subscriber numbers reaching over 10million (Laurel 2013: 123-124). The possibilities in *World of Warcraft* are varied, such as opportunities for playing on different servers (player vs. player, player vs. environment, or role-playing servers) as well as options of 13 different races to choose from, and 12 classes. Moreover, as it is an established world there are (hopefully) less glitches, and there is also an understood gaming protocol. There is a system of progression in *World of Warcraft* for levelling up to level 100[23], and at various levels along the way new talents, skills, and specialisations are unlocked, as well as new mounts for travel and new dungeons. *World of Warcraft* provides quests which can be undertaken individually or in small groups as well as dungeons which require a party and raids which are only accessible to higher level players. There are also possibilities for joining various different guilds which are created by players and which one can join and contribute to. Some of these guilds might be specifically focussed on levelling and achievements, whereas others might have a more social aspect to them. There is also a large amount of research which has taken place within *World of Warcraft*, providing a rich set of literature to draw upon including its own reader: *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader* (2011). Laurel (2013: 123-124), describes *World of Warcraft* as the 'elephant in the marketplace':

> going strong with over 10 million subscribers in 2013 – the largest MMORPG in history. Various types of interactions are enabled by the various "realms" of

[23] At the time of writing, July 2017.

> the game, each with distinctive play properties to suit the palate of the player (for example, how much fighting they want to do). Non-player characters (NPCs) – often with fairly sophisticated AI structures – serve as enemies, friends, wizards, familiars, monsters, and other sorts of forces on the level of character to shape dramatic action. Through devices like deeds, quests, and guilds, *World of Warcraft* as well as many other games of its ilk, provides affordances – often necessities – for significant interaction among players, to work together for common goals or against common enemies.

As stated at the outset of this chapter, I do not suggest that it is only through gaming that one experiences a posthuman subjectivity and similarly I do not suggest that it is only through *World of Warcraft* that one can experience a posthuman subjectivity with an avatar. Much of what I describe in the following thesis could have resonance with gameplayers of any kind – and non-gameplayers at that – as I draw on broader themes of subject formation. However, the research is undeniably highly subjective in nature and entanglements are 'highly specific configurations' (Barad 2007: 74), so it is equally possible that other *World of Warcraft* players may not find the analysis synonymous with their experience.

In practice, the autoethnography took place over a period of 18 months in order to facilitate a deep understanding of the phenomenon of gaming, as well as allowing a distinctive period of time for the relationship between myself and my avatar to form and develop. Examples of works which validate the need for such a period within the gameworld can be seen from Pearce's ethnography for her PhD thesis *Playing Ethnography: A study of emergent behaviour in online games and virtual worlds* (2006), and Sundén's autoethnography as cited in her paper 'Desires at Play: On Closeness and Epistemological Uncertainty' (2012).

It is also important to explain the approach to gameplay that was used to account for the way in which I approached the "field" and the "activity" at study. Aarseth (2003: n.p.n.) asks 'how do we play? Is playing for analytical purposes different from playing for pleasure? That depends on our reason for the analysis' and this highlights the need to analyse gameplay – or our engagement with any media, culture, or environment in

the way that it has been designed to be experienced. For example, Aarseth (2003) points out the ways in which some academics, short on time, might resort to following guides or walkthroughs to get through a videogame more quickly. However, he asks 'how is the flavor of the game kept intact?' (Aarseth 2003: n.p.n.). For me, this is precisely the reason that I played the game *as a game* in my own engagement with it. I believe it is imperative when studying media to study the medium *as it was intended* – inasmuch as that is possible[24]. It would seem disingenuous to state that the avatar-gamer in *World of Warcraft* provides one example of posthuman subjectivity if I were to adopt a playing style that distorted the game to "make" it that way. Instead, I have tried to adopt a playing style that is "natural" to me.

My purpose is to analyse the relationship between avatar and gamer in considering it an embodiment of posthuman subjectivity. My argument is that gaming represents a common example of media usage and therefore that this is phenomenon that is accessible and relatable to a large group of people (whilst in recent years Blizzard have stopped released subscriber numbers (Eurogamer.net 2015), in 2007 *World of Warcraft* had '8.5 million active subscribers spread across four continents: Europe, North America, Asia, and Australia' (Corneliussen and Walker Rettberg 2011: 4)). As such my exploration of gaming and of the avatar-gamer subjectivity should be one that mimics this "everyday"-ness of the experience of the gamer (whatever that may be) and so I have throughout the process done my best to play the game as "naturally" as possible, allowing time for short scratch notes to be taken (see below) and researcher observances to be noted.

This "natural" or "normal" playing style is in itself an entirely subjective thing. Bartle's (1996) *Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players who suit MUDs* discusses four player types that he identifies in MUDs, multi-user dungeons/dimensions that were text based, real-time virtual worlds that were the precursor to MMOs. The player types have continued to be cited in literature pertaining to MMOs and MMORPGs, and still serve as an insightful basis for *how* players play, (although it should be noted that any

[24] Whilst I agree that this doesn't mean that players necessarily always a play a game as it was intended I also believe it is misleading to enter a game for the purposes of researching it only to purposefully disrupt the status quo. An offline ethnography would never commit such a faux pas, so why should it be excusable in an online setting?

player can move between these different styles of play, and the list is far from exhaustive). According to Bartle (1996: n.p.n.), players can be split into achievers ("diamonds" – seeking treasure); explorers ("spades" – digging for information); socialisers ("hearts" – empathising with other players); and killers ("clubs" – hitting and killing people). Aarseth (2003: n.p.n.) adds cheaters to this list, citing those who use walkthroughs or guides as his example. Aarseth (2003: n.p.n.) also goes on to expand the typology of players by emphasising player experience, as whether you are a "newbie", "casual", or "hardcore" gamer also denotes your playing style. Whilst many games appeal only to one "type", Corneliussen and Walker Rettberg (2011: 5) explain that as '*World of Warcraft* is not faithful to any one game genre […] many different kinds of player types (see Bartle 1996) can find activities that interest them in *World of Warcraft*'.

As someone who has grown up around videogames, my own playing style aligns most closely with Bartle's achievers and explorers. I follow the game-related goals and aim to rise in level and complete the tasks and quests set, but also enjoy finding new areas and side quests for exploration, lending a sense of mystery and non-linearity to the game. As Bartle (1996: n.p.n.) states:

> [for achievers] it's the fact that the game environment is a fully-fledged world in which they can immerse themselves that they find compelling […] [for explorers] it's the sense of wonder which the virtual world imbues that they crave for; […] Scoring points all the time is a worthless occupation, because it defies the very open-endedness that makes a world live and breathe.

I would say that I am a "casual" player of games but was new to *World of Warcraft*, and had not previously played it before embarking on this PhD project. As such, for my own gameplay experiences I have noted that my initial aim in being an "achiever" was at times been in order to overcome the "newbie" status, but that later in the game, once comfortable with my surroundings and the game narrative I was more willing to veer away from the narrative to find side quests and missions. This is in line

with my playing style of other videogames that offer an adventure and explore style narrative (e.g. *Fable*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Dying Light*, etc.).

Bartle (1996: n.p.n.) suggests that the difference between achievers/explorers and socialisers/killers is that whereas achievers/explorers aim to interact with or act upon the *gameworld*; socialisers/killers aim to interact with or act upon the *gameplayers*. My achiever/explorer inclination therefore suggests a less social approach to gameplay, and it could be argued that this suits an exploration of the avatar-gamer subjectivity as this is my main engagement in the game, rather than focussing on trying to create relationships with other players. Nevertheless, in order to at least attempt to incorporate some knowledge of the social aspects of *World of Warcraft* in my analysis I joined guilds, engaged in chats, and took part in dungeons and battlegrounds. Interestingly, as my fieldnotes show throughout chapters 5-7, these experiences at times suggest a "killer" streak in my gameplay, where inflicting damage has demonstrated how '[k]illers are proud of their reputation and of their oft-practiced fighting skills' (Bartle 1996: n.p.n.).

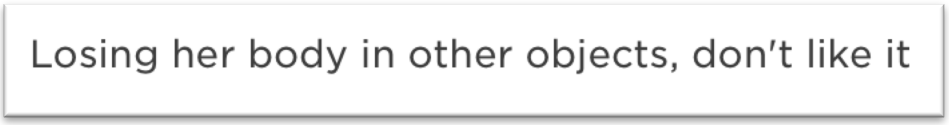
The main issue encountered with socialising in the game was that the game mechanics in *World of Warcraft* seem to strongly separate socialising from gameplay. The following fieldnote explains this in more depth:

> *I have often thought about the way that interaction with other players can take you away from the gaming experience. This happens for example when you are having conversations about things completely unrelated to* World of Warcraft*, or, in a more literal sense, if you are engaged in chat, it is very difficult to both move your avatar and type into the chat box. This means that the two actions are nearly mutually exclusive. It is part of the reason why have found it difficult to become involved in guilds. I want to study the experiences in gameplay, not the community interaction. I want to study my relationship with Etyme, my avatar, my character, not so much the relationships formed with other players. Obviously this is a significant part of the game, nevertheless, I have struggled to find it an interactive part of GAMEPLAY. This morning whilst gaming I had the realisation that this is because the act of typing takes you away from the avatar*

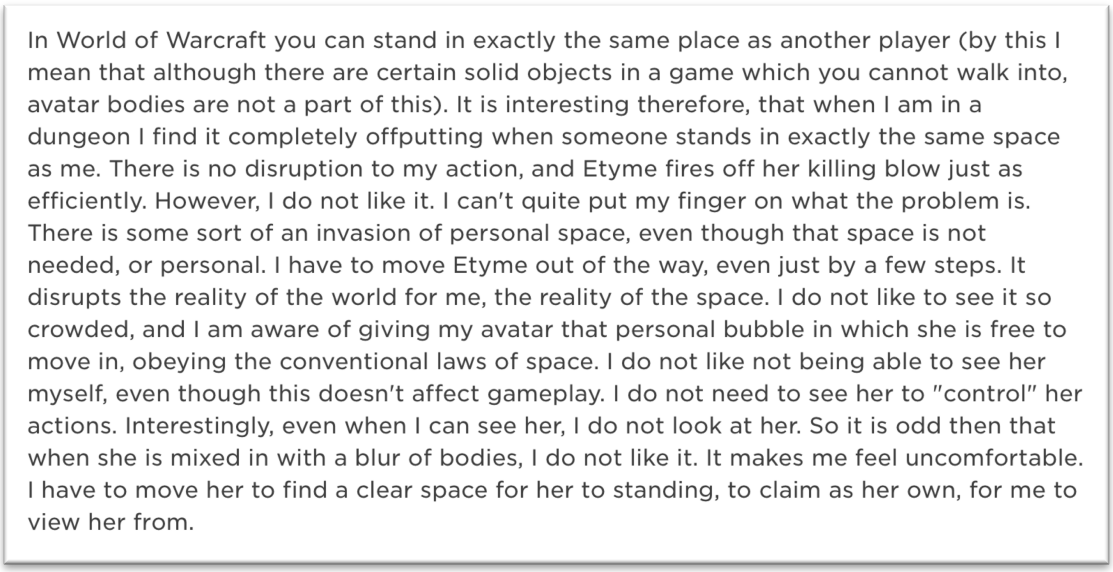
body, and in this way, the avatar becomes "disembodied". From my experience the act of gaming is very embodied. However, typing, is a completely different experience. It effectively means "separating" from the avatar in favour of another pursuit. This is my problem with the guilds. If the chat is minimal, the "disembodied" effect on the avatar is not so noticeable. However, if chat is sustained, what is the avatar body there for? It does not indicate your presence because that has shifted to a "liveness" and immediacy within the chat box – not the gameworld. Perhaps this effect would be less troubling and indicate less of a "break" with the avatar if the avatar bodies of those you were chatting with were nearby. Chatting with someone who you can see at least indicates that it is the avatars too who are communicating (this is also the case in dungeons and sometimes battlegrounds depending on your proximity to those who are chatting). In these instances, if the avatars are still you can consider it a normal aspect of conversation as proximity is required and it is not unnatural to stand and have a conversation with someone. If you are in the same guild however, you can engage in guild chat whilst being nowhere near each other – these words appearing in the chat box with no indication as to the body (avatar or otherwise) behind them. In this case then, the immobility of the avatar is an oddity; incongruous. As MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler (2011: 232) state: '[t]he act of having to type every word a character says places a remove between player and avatar'.

Fieldnotes and analysis

Participant observation therefore operated through participation in the game and observation of the phenomena and the lived experience of gaming. As Boellstorff et al. (2012: 88) state: 'there is no shortcut to the investments of time and immersion required for effective participant observation research'. Short "scratch notes" (Ottenberg 1990: 148) were made during gameplay in order to capture key data points to then be developed into extensive fieldnotes following each gaming session.



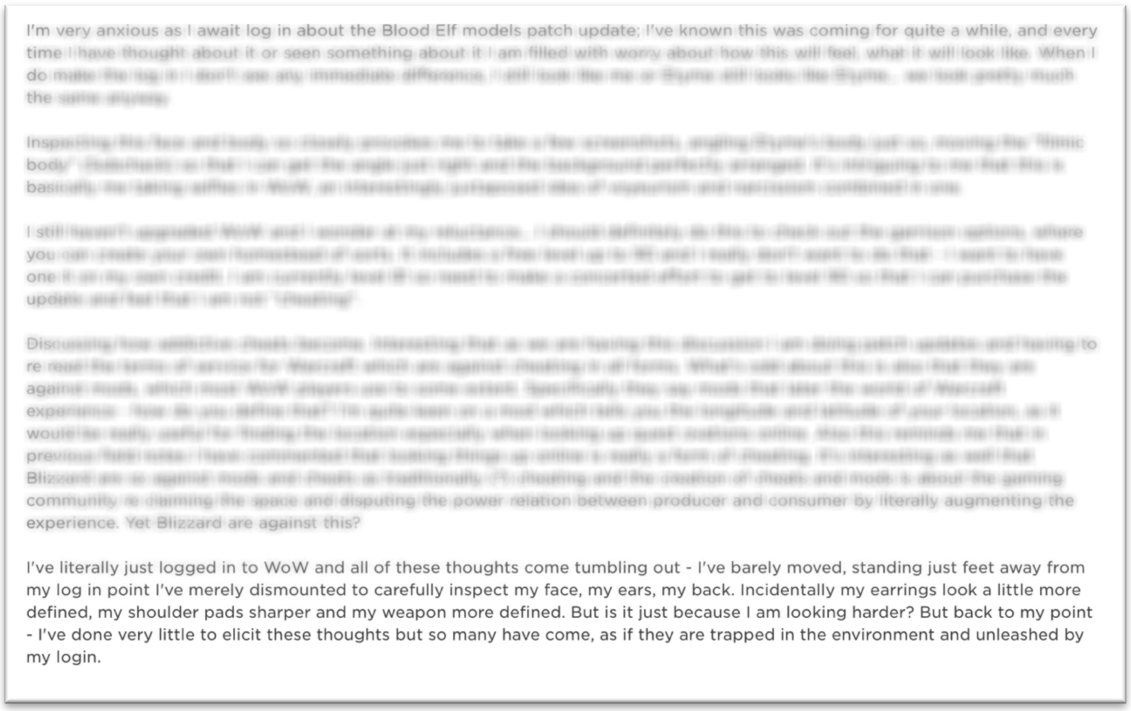
(example of a short scratch note)



(example of the written up fieldnote)

This enabled me to keep track of notable moments without having to fully disrupt the gameplay by writing them up immediately, although occasionally I would "pause" my gameplay to write up a detailed description of a moment if there were aspects that I felt I might not remember clearly that I felt were particularly notable. This fluctuation in notation style links with broader research surrounding ethnography, which has demonstrated that the different ways in which ethnographers write their fieldnotes depends on their approach to the nature of participant observation (Emerson et al. 2007: 354). For the most part my notes served as reminders, 'entries to be elaborated and "finished" upon leaving the field' (Emerson et al. 2007: 354). However, the "pausing" in gameplay to write a fieldnote was sometimes spurred on by a desire to write about gameplay whilst still in a specific game location – for example, if I were writing about the atmosphere or environment that I was in, pausing in my gameplay whilst still in that place helped me to attempt to express that affective encounter in writing, taking the time to more carefully examine the assault on my senses. In a similar way, often, rather than leaving the game entirely and exiting the application on my laptop I would instead

log out of the game but leave it running on the character selection screen whilst writing my fieldnote. This would provide me with an audio-visual link to the game that somehow made me feel still suspended in my connection with the game whilst writing up my notes in more detail on an alternative device. Alternatively, there were times when the audio-visual link and being in the gameworld were enough to elicit a response before even "playing" (see below example).



I'm very anxious as I await log in about the Blood Elf models patch update; I've known this was coming for quite a while, and every time I have thought about it or seen something about it I am filled with worry about how this will feel, what it will look like. When I do make the log in I don't see any immediate difference, I still look like me or Elyme still looks like Elyme... we look pretty much the same anyway.

Inspecting the face and body so closely provokes me to take a few screenshots, angling Elyme's body just so, moving the "filmic body" (Debichecki in Poli) I can get the angle just right and the background perfectly arranged. It's intriguing to me that this is basically me taking selfies in WoW, an interestingly juxtaposed idea of voyeurism and narcissism combined in one.

I still haven't upgraded WoW and I wonder at my reluctance. I should definitely do this to check out the garrison options, where you can create your own homestead of sorts. It includes a free boat up to 90 and I really don't want to do that. I want to have one it on my own credit. I am currently level 91 so need to make a concerted effort to get to level 99 so that I can purchase the update and feel that I am not "cheating".

Discussing how addictive cheats become, interesting that as we are having this discussion I am doing patch updates and having to re-read the terms of service for Warcraft which are against cheating in all forms. What's odd about this is also that they are against mods, which most WoW players use to some extent. Specifically they say mods that take the world of Warcraft experience. "how do you define that?" I'm quite keen on a mod which tells you the longitude and latitude of your location, as it would be really useful for finding the location especially when looking up quest locations online. Also this reminds me that in previous field notes I have commented that looking things up online is really a form of cheating. It's interesting as well that Blizzard are so against mods and cheats as traditionally (?) cheating and the creation of cheats and mods is about the gaming community re-claiming the space and disputing the power relation between producer and consumer by literally augmenting the experience. Yet Blizzard are against this?

I've literally just logged in to WoW and all of these thoughts come tumbling out - I've barely moved, standing just feet away from my log in point I've merely dismounted to carefully inspect my face, my ears, my back. Incidentally my earrings look a little more defined, my shoulder pads sharper and my weapon more defined. But is it just because I am looking harder? But back to my point - I've done very little to elicit these thoughts but so many have come, as if they are trapped in the environment and unleashed by my login.

(example of a fieldnote that was written when logged in to *World of Warcraft* but "paused" from gameplay. Blurring applied for emphasis on relevant extract but to demonstrate length of fieldnote)

That said, for the most part the production of scratch notes that were later developed allowed me to play the game as a "naturally" as possible – i.e. as I would play any game, as a "gamer" rather than as a "researcher".

Boellstorff et al. (2012: 84) recommend 'priorities to guide the production of fieldnotes' for participant observation, whilst also noting the importance of being open-ended in order to allow for the transcription of details which may at the time be deemed superfluous but at a later date could contribute to research findings. For my own

research the guiding priorities emerging from the research questions were initially descriptions of the lived experience of gaming; the relationship between avatar and gamer (embodiment, subjectivity etc.); and the relationship of human with machine (gamer with game, player with computer). As my themes began to emerge this helped to refine my research questions and also guide the production of fieldnotes (these are discussed more in the following chapters, 5-7).

I used the note-taking application Evernote to write, collect and organise my fieldnotes. Evernote is a cloud based application that allowed me to access my notes from a variety of devices as well as through the browser application from any device with an internet connection, and these would all automatically sync as notes were added or amended. The application is password protected and my notebooks are private so cannot be accessed by any other parties. I created a designated "notebook" for my fieldnotes, and wrote notes directly into the application. Evernote allows fieldnotes to be tagged, which fits with traditional ethnographic data tagging – labelling notes with micro-units before coding into categories of data (Boellstorff et al. 2012: 165). This enabled me to see when particular ideas or moments were more popular and demonstrated an emergent theme, which I then went on to analyse.

Data analysis of the autoethnographic fieldnotes took place by looking at the fieldnotes in a new light, reading them with the purpose of looking for emerging themes and patterns in the data. Boellstorff et al. (2012: 166) state that '[t]he key to data analysis is to interact with the dataset: read it, study it, immerse oneself within it, and let the data paint a portrait of the culture we are studying,' – let us here replace "culture" with "experience" or "subjectivity" and the engagement with data is the same. Chang (2008: 131) suggests various strategies for the continued efforts of data analysis and interpretation in autoethnography, including: searching for recurring topics, themes, and patterns; identifying exceptional occurrences; comparing yourself with other cases; contextualising; comparing with social science constructs and ideas and framing with theories. For Boellstorff et al. (2012: 167 and 168) '[w]hatever procedures we employ, the goal is to organize the data into manageable pieces we can then thematically analyse and easily locate when writing up research results […] the goal of analysing data collected via participant observation is to discover patterns that illuminate the research question and develop new insights'.

For me this phase was interesting as the emergence of the three main themes seemed to be for the most part rather organic, and Savin-Baden and Major (2012: 440) have stated that thematic analysis 'acknowledges that analysis happens at an intuitive level' through "immersion" in data.

The first theme I identified, focussing on the performative aspects of gaming and links to acting theory, was unsurprising given my background in performance. As Chapter 5: From Acting to Intra-Acting demonstrates, this theme was also one that became immediately apparent as the initial phases of the game are in some ways some of the most strikingly similar to performance as the process of developing a character is central to the beginning of the game and here some of the most obvious overlaps occur. Whilst there were tags such as "performance" and "gaming as acting", fieldnotes were also tagged with, for example, "narrative" or "appearance", so that these then also developed subthemes for analysis.

As I progressed through the game the emergence of empathetic feelings were increasingly common. These affective and visceral moments could not be ignored and I began to notice a pattern emerging in the moments that I was most compelled to write about and the connection I had with Etyme at these times. Empathy was therefore a more "emergent" theme, in that it is less obviously linked to a particular researcher bias or aspect of my own situated knowledge. These moments were particularly affective, and initially tags varied from "embodiment" to "frustration", "feeling hurt"; "concern" etc. The "empathy" tag was applied retrospectively to some of the fieldnotes gathered under various headings, as I began to notice this as a common factor and consider this as the analytic that could be applied to these moments.

The theme regarding the broader aspects of subject formation arose from a gradual documentation of aspects that occurred after I had been playing for some time, when the avatar-gamer subjectivity had existed for long enough to have a "history". I noticed moments where I reflected on the "lifecycle" of my time in game and realised how this provoked moments of nostalgia. In doing so this allowed me the opportunity to consider these reflexive, "subject forming" practices *outside* of the game, which enabled a critical re-interrogation of these practices as intrinsically humanistic.

The constantly interconnected timescales which any research takes place along is evident in this way through my own fieldnotes which begin to reference other literature, move into analysis, refer to others of my own fieldnotes and begin to even construct their own narrative. The idea of these phases being distinct between data collection, tagging, analysis and developing narratives is a neat but often inaccurate view of ethnography, as all of the phases often intermingle. As Emerson et al. (2007: 361) state, fieldnotes 'provide a critical, first opportunity to write down and hence to develop initial interpretations and analyses'. The incorporation of analytical asides in fieldnotes has been suggested in various ways, for example through the addition of separate, theoretical notes (Schatzman and Strauss 1973) or through bracketed analytic ideas (Lofland and Lofland 1995). However, my own style is more in keeping with Emerson et al.'s (1995) suggestion of 'in-process analytic writing' that incorporates asides and commentaries within the fieldnote itself, that is then further developed through the analytical stage. It is my belief that for autoethnography and affective research the disruption of observational vs. analytical stages is even more muddied by the fact that the researcher is so intimately involved with their own data and analysis that it is unlikely that a concrete distinction would occur. As Rambo Ronai (1992: 104) explains, 'the telling of [one's experience] is a circular process of interpretation that blurs and intertwines both cognitive and emotional understandings'. Accordingly, I began grouping fieldnotes and drafting analyses of themes whilst my gaming was ongoing, and this meant a constant process of adding to the emerging themes as more, relevant fieldnotes were collected to add to each narrative[25].

On the one hand, these themes form the basis for the aspects of experience that I have chosen to analyse, and I then engaged in a process of filtering through different fieldnotes and selecting the most "appropriate" to explore. As with all research, more was written both in terms of fieldnotes and analysis than appears within this thesis, but the fieldnotes that were selected were chosen both for their affectivity and their ability to demonstrate a particular notion concisely and with clarity. After grouping my fieldnotes into different themes a form of diffractive thematic analysis occurred. I engaged with the fieldnotes critically, reading them against literature for that "theme"

[25] This process occurs across qualitative research in various methods from ethnography to grounded theory, returning to the "field" in order to check assumptions and deepen knowledge.

(acting, empathy, subject formation), drawing comparisons and conclusions and 'developing narratives and arguments that bring us to larger theoretical and conceptual points' (Boellstorff et al. 2012: 174).

However, I then engaged with these fieldnotes "diffractively", which occurs as 'a critical practice of engagement' (Barad 2007: 90), considering how different approaches to our practices matter (Barad 2007: 72). Rather than themes of acting, empathy, and subject formation being left to account for subjectivity in their own right, I re-read these themes *through* posthumanism, marking the differences within the humanist themes and posthuman ideologies. I considered different ways of re-reading these humanist notions (that the themes perpetuated) in posthuman ways, searching for the differences in understandings that humanist vs. posthumanist practices might provide. This allows a consideration of how we might conceive of posthuman subjectivity not only as a "being" but as a "doing".

The next chapter explores these themes in more detail, but before moving on to their discussion and into analysis, the final section of this chapter provides some explanation and justification for how the fieldnotes are presented in the following chapters.

Presenting the data

In terms of the presentation of the fieldnotes in the thesis this is perhaps where my own use of the method differs from some of the more narrative forms that autoethnography can be presented in (as discussed in the above section "Autoethnography"). There are ways of writing an autoethnography in a completely narrative way that seems to fluidly blend research and analysis together in an accessible form that does not jar the reader between two subject positions. For my own autoethnography the structure and style follows something more akin to Moriarty's (2008: 20) presentation of her interview data, which she presents thus:

> [w]hat follows is the edited transcript of my interviews with 'Alice', interspersed with my own narrative and reflections on what was discussed that

> are distinguished from our conversation in italics. The writing in italics is my attempt to be personal and creative in the writing up of my data. The indented sections that are in bold provide my analysis of the interview that evolved having considered the interview data and my personal reflections on the Alice's answers in relation to my own experience with academic writing, thus drawing together my personal quest to be creative and my objective to produce meaningful data on the academic writing process.

In a similar way in my own thesis the fieldnotes are kept within the main body of the text in italics. This enables them to both be easily identified as the "data" but also to be fully integrated into the analysis. The fieldnotes and the theory are not separate – throughout the text there are parts where either fieldnote or analysis merges into or borrows from the other. However, as, for the most part, the fieldnotes are so specifically written from an in-game perspective, to construct a linear and narrative piece of text that seamlessly integrated fieldnotes with no definition would require a thesis which was positioned entirely within *World of Warcraft*. Whilst this would be intriguing to see, for my own thesis I felt the need to account for the fieldnotes as contextual, emergent constructions, particularly given the idea that they are being used as a performative example of the posthuman subjectivity that emerges from the intra-action of Etyme and I. Outside of the specificity of that intra-action in-game, my (posthuman) subjectivity shifts, and the researcher analysis demonstrates this through another, emergent, "voice".

This is similar to the layered account of Rambo Ronai (1992: 103), which uses multiple layers of reflection that shift 'forward, backward, and sideways through time, space, and various attitudes in a narrative format'. She states that '[a]lthough it is not possible to capture the lived experience, the layered account as a form allows me to express the multiplicity of identities I embody when making a report' (Rambo Ronai 1992: 123; see also To 2015: 71 for an explanation of the multiple "I"s that occur in their critical, affective, autoethnographic montage). My own accounting does not occur in such a layered way but the ability to switch between the notes, which embody a very particular posthuman subjectivity, and the "analysis" or "commentary", which embody

another, differently specific subjectivity – the researcher role – means that I feel that both are accounted for in the final thesis. It is for this reason that my fieldnotes appear at times in sizeable chunks – I want it to be apparent to the reader that the multiplicity of identities that I embody are tangible. I considered presenting the fieldnotes in a different way, perhaps in columns alongside the theory to make sure neither were viewed with a hierarchical slant. However, in much the same way as I stated that 'the narrative form can be seen to be an appropriate method of communicating cultural experience as it is through narrative that we understand our own lives' (MacIntyre 1984: 212 cited in Ellis and Bochner 1992: 97) as a justification for autoethnography, it is also a justification for how my writing is presented.

I use my writing to make sense of my experiences and whilst this does not mean that my thoughts or experiences flow neatly from left to right, from top to bottom of a page it is nevertheless important that I acknowledge how much the practice of writing has allowed the exploration of my notes and my experiences to flow from me. This can be linked to various posthuman understandings of our intra-actions with our technologies as formative.

Recounting the claim of Nobel Prize-winning physicist Feynman, Clark (2008: xxv) writes that Feynman claimed of his notes and records that he 'actually did the work on the paper'. Clark (2008: xxv) continues:

> Feynman's suggestion is, at the very least, that the loop into the external medium was integral to his intellectual activity (the "working") itself. But I would like to go further and suggest that Feynman was actually thinking on the paper. The loop through pen and paper is part of the physical machinery responsible for the shape of the flow of thoughts and ideas.

In the same way it is true to say that the medium of writing (on a computer no less) has shaped the way in which I have presented and explored this thesis myself: the physical machinery has shaped my theorising.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with an overview of game research methods in order to explain the difficulties of applying certain traditional approaches to this research project. Having identified autoethnography as a potential methodology, I have explained the key aspects of this approach, and the way in which it can be used to explore affective experiences. However, I have also identified the potentially problematic contradictions in the use of a methodology so focussed on subjective, individual experience when writing about the instability of "self", and the multiplicity of being. Drawing on the need for accessible forms of research, and the inability to escape certain humanistic constructs in our current societies, I have instead argued for a posthuman "I". The use of this "I" in the research embracing the "self" as distributed and emergent, and acts as a performance of posthuman subjectivity itself. Following on from this theoretical critique, the practical application of this methodology was explained.

Part of what has been so hard about writing this thesis has been the problem that I have repeatedly written about – the fact that each presentation is a fallacy, that each separation is a lie. Nevertheless, without them I would have been (at indeed at times *have* been) paralysed, unable to write, unable to make any claims – '[a]ny literary form imprisons lived experience; yet, without form or structure, it would be impossible to convey any experience' (Rambo Ronai 1992: 123). Presenting my thesis this way may not be what is most "true" about lived experience, but it is "accurate" in that it is how I came to make sense of it. For me this was not a process of stitching together different pre-determined or pre-written snippets or segments. I write in a tirade, in a flurry, and in a process of discovery[26]. It's only afterwards that I try and make sense of my making-sense, and for that I am grateful for Dr. Adrienne Evans' patience in helping me to sift meaning from discovery. What you now go on to read is a somewhat polished version of this overspill of thoughts and the key-tapping exploration of ideas, but I hope you can forgive its structure as the way that worked for this invention of it. The following

[26] See for a similar experience St. Pierre (2005: 970): 'I used writing as a method of data analysis by using writing to think; […] [t]hought happened in the writing. As I wrote, I watched word after word appear on the computer screen-ideas, theories, I had not thought before I wrote them. Sometimes I wrote something so marvelous it startled me. *I doubt I could have thought such a thought by thinking alone*' (original emphasis).

chapter introduces each of the themes of this thesis, before Chapters 5-7 move into the analysis of fieldnotes in more depth.

Chapter 4: Themes, Positions and Disclaimers

Introduction

My proposal is that the MMORPG gamer is an embodiment of posthuman subjectivity that allows us to explore subject formation in an enmeshed and entangled way. Having made this claim, and having then stated my proposed method of exploring this concept through my own gameplay in *World of Warcraft*, this chapter serves two purposes. It is both a guide and a disclaimer: a guide through what the thesis is, and a disclaimer about what it is not.

The following three chapters set out some of the ways in which my own experience of gaming in the MMORPG *World of Warcraft* has been experienced: through experiences that can be linked to acting, empathy, and different ways of subject formation. It is important to state at the outset this is not what I consider to be a three-step approach to "immersion", which is at best an ambiguous term. Definitions of immersion are widespread and are used somewhat inconsistently. Farrow and Iacovides offer a short review of prior definitions of "immersion" and the term emerges variously as "presence" (which follows attention-based engagement and emotional investment-based engrossment) (Brown and Cairns 2004: 1299 cited in Farrow and Iacovides 2012: 2-3); or as describing the relation to the narrative (whereas "engagement" is used to describe relation to the strategy and achievement level of gameplay) (McMahan 2003: 69 cited in Farrow and Iacovides 2012: 3). Although various authors discuss immersion as a transparency of technology, such as Bolter and Grusin (2000: 21, my emphasis) who state that '[v]irtual reality is immersive, *which means that it is a medium whose purpose is to disappear*', these kinds of accounts are techno-centric. We shouldn't forget, in our current Western technologically mediated climate, that we are just as able and likely to become "immersed" in "old media" formats such as books or paintings as we are in a videogame. As Ferreday (2009: 6) claims, '[i]mmersion is not a property of certain technologies, but a relation between technologies and users: hence the absurdity of claiming that some activities or technologies are more immersive than others'.

A further concern with the language of "immersion" to explain technologically saturated societies is that immersion seems synonymous with doing something well.

Examples include the emphasis on immersion in gaming, achieving a "oneness" with the character in acting, and Csikszentmihalyi's "flow", all of which seem to suggest that a not-thinking, subconscious and intuitive state is to be privileged above any other. In gaming research, for example, Farrow and Iacovides (2012: 5-6) state that '[f]or a convincing and immersive experience, one should be more or less unaware of the way in which it is being mediated'. Theatre director Stanislavsky (1937: 13) writes that 'the very best that can happen is to have the actor completely carried away by the play' and that in these moments the action takes place intuitively and subconsciously. Similarly, in Csikszentmihalyi's (2004) TED talk 'Flow, the secret to happiness' he uses the example of a leading composer in the 1970's explaining 'how he feels when composing is going well. And he says by describing it as an ecstatic state'. Csikszentmihalyi (2004) continues that being in the creative flow takes up all of one's creative attention and concentration so that there is no capacity to feel anything else: 'existence is temporarily suspended'.

All of these states (and sometimes the specific quotes) have been used throughout this thesis to describe the feelings that I have encountered and experienced in-game. However, whilst chapters 5-7 of this thesis demonstrate how even problematic humanistic notions can be posthumanised to account for their experience differently, it is the role of this chapter to make clear that although these are states that we could assign to the experience of gaming, they are in no way all that it is.

To attempt to achieve what Csikszentmihalyi (2004) identifies as a constant state of "flow"; what Farrow and Iacovides (2012) term "immersion"; or what Stanislavsky (1937) labels the "subconscious and intuitive moment" would be suggestive of a humanist level of control over such engagement with our activities. Whilst there are doubtless times when these feelings occur within my gaming and fieldnotes, I do not see these moments as indicative of a particular achievement on my part – certainly not on my part alone. They form a part of the gaming experience, but to privilege these moments and to focus only on them in the thesis would be detrimental and dishonest. Rather, the following chapters aim to describe and critically analyse these feelings in more depth, but also to acknowledge the times and ways in which these states or feelings are destabilised or simply not felt. To account for the aspects of gaming that both demonstrate as well as destabilise humanistic notions such as

achievement and to explore the times when gaming is encountered with boredom, frustration or disinterest (seen in Chapter 7: Emergent Subject Positions) is, in my opinion, imperative in assuring that the depiction and portrayal of the gaming experience or the posthuman experience is characteristic of the different events we encounter in life. Crucially, this does not offer a transcendent removal from that which is necessarily dull (see Petit 2015 for an account of "digital disaffects" such as boredom, detachment and ennui) nor does it suggest that posthuman subjectivity is only a "state" that can be "achieved" through feelings of affectionate connection with the machine. Put simply, I do not wish to create an account of the posthuman experience that focuses only on "exciting" or "engaging" moments, and avoids "the boring bits". As Chapter 7: Emergent Subject Positions demonstrates, this would create a problematic version of the posthuman, as it would still be caught up in humanistic practices linked to measurement and self-betterment.

Instead, the following chapters offer an account of how a posthuman subjectivity is "facilitated" or felt – or, to put it another way, different ways in which we can account for subjectivity in posthuman ways. Drawing on aspects of entanglement, intra-action, and post-anthropocentrism this thesis suggests that we are always enmeshed with our technologies. In a similar way, I would argue that we are always enmeshed in our ways of meaning-making. Rather than experiencing subjectivity first and accounting for it second, what is presented in this thesis is a performative account of the process of an emergent posthuman subjectivity (see the previous chapter for further explanation of this). As Kozel (2007: 9) states: 'reflection is not only a secondary process or a commentary on experience, but also the process of thinking that transforms the doing'. Read through this lens, accounting for our own subjectivity is as much part of the experience of being a subject: both reflecting and experiencing are subjective effects and, as Barad (2007: 26) states, 'our knowledge making practices are social-material enactments that contribute to, and are a part of, the phenomena we describe'. This said, the subjectivity that I aim to demonstrate in my fieldnotes is decentred – the subject is not "me" but a posthuman amalgamation of entangled components, compromised of gamer, avatar, game, technology, environment, and all other facets (both known and unknown) that contribute to that experience. This is made apparent through the different positions that are articulated within the

fieldnotes, as well as the fact that the fieldnotes could not exist without the intra-action with the "other".

However, all enactments of knowledge making are constructed to some extent and the same can be said of this thesis. In order to present a readable and coherent account of my gameplay the following analysis of my experiences within the themes of acting, empathy and subject formation are presented separately, even whilst they had no clear distinction within my own experience. In support of this disclaimer, I think it worth repeating the words of Markham (1998: 86) in her own auto/ethnographic inquiry into *Life Online*:

> [b]efore you read about these themes […] let me offer two specific caveats: First, these three themes can be separated heuristically, but they also are inseparably woven into lived experiences. Each theme is nested within and encompasses the others. I could not prioritize these themes into levels of relevance or importance for the users, or into any causal sequence […]. They are simply different moments of lived experiences. Second, I have separated these themes artificially for the purpose of presenting a somewhat coherent narrative.

Like Markham, my chapters on acting, empathy and subject formation are not perceived or experienced during gameplay as three separate components. Rather, each of these experiences folds into the others, forming a part of the experience alongside the many other, unaccounted for instances and episodes. To help make sense and understand the experiences, different moments have been selected, pulled apart and analysed in an individual section, in an effort to demonstrate each analytically and somewhat distinctly. Decisions have also necessarily been made about which extracts or elements of my diary are represented here. The aim is to avoid unnecessary confusion of the argument. However, as you will read, even with this attempt the themes necessarily spill into one another and overlaps are at times unavoidable.

These distinctions are akin to the idea of the "strategic I" as explained in my methodology (see Chapter 3: Embracing Methodological Contradictions), and the overall difficulties of trying to coherently present a complex and intertwined

experience. The "I" is chosen to make sense of something in a heuristic, imperfect way to distinguish something that this thesis proposes is fluid, permeable and indistinguishable from the other human and non-human objects in its environment. So, too, the "themes" are employed to create a narrative, accessible journey through the posthuman subjective experience of gaming. The themes were often experienced in parallel with one another, and there should not be any sense of hierarchy read into them – it is not that case that one experience has been identified as more "important" or pivotal than another, and it would go against posthuman ethics to believe so. The order of the chapters does however indicate the order in which I encountered and uncovered these analytics through my own gameplay. However, this is not a claim that the same would be true for anyone else, or that one necessarily "leads" to another or that these analytics demonstrate a progression of immersion in the game.

The use of these three themes is to show how the basic structures are in place to allow for these particular readings of the experience and subjective feelings. These themes have arisen from the specific relationship between Etyme and I, and therefore account only for how our specific posthuman experience was created and felt. The entanglement that has constituted the posthuman subject at study in this thesis is one that is always in flux and for anyone else would always necessarily be made up of different (but always culturally intelligible) components. This resonates with Barad (2007: 58 and 74) when she states that 'entangled practices are productive, and who and what are excluded through these entangled practices matter: different intra-actions produce different phenomena […] the specificity of entanglements is everything'. The phenomena at study here has been produced through the intra-action of game, avatar and gamer; as well as multiple other entangled components. For another posthuman subject the intra-action would include other components, accounting for the different ways in which our subjectivities are formed and the different entanglements that we are involved in. That said, the themes of acting, empathy, and subject formation are ones that can occur across a variety of entanglements, and are not game-specific. The ways that my account has resonance with others beyond myself demonstrates the usability and accessibility of such structures and how they are indicative of experiences that others will have had also. However, more than that, they demonstrate just a few of the ways we can delve into data collected around posthuman being and critically analyse

deconstruct the experiences and feelings therein. This allows us to "posthumanise" humanistic notions of subjectivity and being. Taking up the posthuman challenge, the rewriting of humanistic notions moves otherwise static and stable constructs (e.g. acting, empathy, subject formation) and shows how they rely heavily on affect, entanglement, and exchange.

Introducing the themes: acting, empathy, subject formation

As an actor and performance studies and drama graduate it was unsurprising that my interests would shape my first experiences in game. There are many echoes between performance and gaming, and Chapter 5: From Acting to Intra-acting therefore draws on my knowledge from and about the skills involved in acting and performance. In that chapter I draw on various acting methods to analyse the game and gameplay. However, as far as disclaimers go, it is also important to say what that chapter is not. It does not argue that the embodiment of a game character is indistinguishable to the experience of embodying a character for the stage, as, from my experience, this is not the case. Whilst there are many overlaps, these two experiences each have their own individual traits.

In some ways, the actor could be considered as a posthuman performer, if we were to understand the reliance on external influences and foregrounding of a "non-human" (fictional) other as examples of permeability and post-anthropocentrism. Whilst this chapter doesn't elaborate in depth on the theatre actor as already-posthuman, the application of the resulting "posthuman acting" that I propose could easily be applied outside of game environments. It could be argued that the actor/performer already embodies an enactment of a posthuman subjectivity; sharing agency between actor, character, director, audience, and many other non-human elements. However, in many performances or acting techniques there is still an implied sense of mastery and control that the actor exerts over their performance, suggesting a much more humanistic attitude and approach. Whilst the theatre-actor as posthuman is a fascinating embodiment to be considered, and an area that I would be keen to explore further in the future, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to adequately analyse this without deviating from the main aims and objectives. What I do show in this chapter are the similarities

between gaming and acting through the subjective experience of performance, as an actor performing in various shows throughout the writing of this thesis.

In some ways the comparisons in this chapter are more "text" based here than in any other chapter – by which I mean they consider game *mechanics* (i.e. the structures in place) as well as game *play*. I offer an insight into how the initial gameplay set up could be used by the gamer as a form of "script", giving glimpses into the backstory for gamers to glean knowledge about their environment, race, class etc. and how this might go on to inform and shape their gameplay. I draw on notions such as "given circumstances" – the information that is contained within a script that serves as a foundation for a character. Considering these in a posthuman light, rather than through a humanistic understanding of control and mastery, demonstrates the intra-action that occurs between avatar and gamer. In the same way as the game requires the gamer to function, so too does the character require the actor, and so both "performances" are necessarily an enmeshment of the two. Both can only *become* through an ability to give and receive, to affect and to be affected. This allows the posthuman subjectivity that involves both avatar and gamer to emerge, and an understanding of the character as separate or "other" in either medium disappears.

There are some basic and useful correlations when considering the performance of actor and gamer: for example, the desire to portray or control the character in a specific way is a demonstration of the desire to show and be seen. The role of an audience presents interesting questions that could be explored in future analysis and research, for example: does the involvement or presence of an audience facilitate or encourage the emergence of the posthuman subjectivity? Whilst my own research focuses on the relationship between avatar and gamer rather than gamer and community, the presence of a perceived "audience" in game still undoubtedly influenced my experience in-game.

One clear example of the performative nature of game mechanics is evident in the time spent on appearance and the desire to become a "well-rounded" player through developing my other skills and talents aside from those required from the immediate gameplay. Whilst this was driven in a large way by my own sense of satisfaction and of "completeness" it would be negligent to ignore the implications of being able to "be

seen" and the impact this had on me as a gamer. The ability to customise your appearance through armour etc. as you progress in game is of a practical and defensive use. However, I was often driven by the desire to be aesthetically well put together so that encountering players would view me as a coherent character – just as in 'real life' (RL) the coherence and care over one's appearance is one that is judged and valued.

There are various overlaps between acting and empathy, as both value the ability to feel and respond to an "other's" circumstances and situations, whether they are fictional or "real". In fact, empathy itself has been shown to make use of the same neuronal pathways, regardless of whether the events are 'fictional' or 'real life' (Kemp 2012: xviii), so that the biological body empathetically reacts in chemically similar ways to characters in books and films as it would to another material body. I therefore follow the acting chapter with the theme of empathy in Chapter 6, which takes some similar aspects from acting but applies them outside of a performance context to demonstrate an expansion of how posthuman subjectivity is evident in gaming through another lens. The chapter that focuses on empathy explores the entwinement of self and other which takes place between avatar and gamer and considers the ways in which this is actually experienced. Far from moving the analysis away from the performative, it extends ideas of how an actor can come to know his or her character. In engaging with the avatar and experiencing its feelings, we open ourselves up to be affected by them in a variety of different ways – as is also the case in acting and performance. In order to create a "performance" that tells the intended story the actor needs to be able to feel what the character is feeling in order to portray it correctly and coherently. In gaming, the avatar's and gamer's desires are aligned in order to progress through the game. If a game avatar is being attacked by an in-game mob and the gamer does not react and respond as though it were their own body, the avatar will "die" – thus impacting the playability of the game. Similarly, if the gamer does not take on the challenges, quests and tasks given to their avatar they will not "succeed" in the game[27]. Although these descriptions may sound humanist in their intention, the empathy chapter shows how this capacity to feel and act in unison with the avatar occurs not through conscious control,

[27] Whilst such forms of engagement (and others that purposefully subvert the "classic" form of engaging with a game, e.g. speed runs) are entirely possible and do exist, they are usually considered to be "deviant" strategies that are not playing the game as it was designed to be played.

but through affective empathic encounters that demonstrate the intermingling of avatar and gamer goals such that they are not separate desires but agentic capacities that operate in relation to one another.

The analysis in this chapter therefore explores aspects of empathic feeling with the avatar through cognitive, affective and embodied means. Rather than suggesting that it is only through experiencing viscerally both narrative and embodied empathy that gameplay can take place; this chapter instead suggests that empathy is one way in which we can account for the subjectivity which arises as a result of the relation between human and machine. Through the alignment of cognitive, affective and embodied states the entanglement of avatar and gamer is demonstrated as the desires of one become the desires of the other. The bodily response and reaction to the avatar body is in some ways beneficial for the gameplay itself – both through eliciting a swift response and further through embedding an emotional connection with the story.

Again, the disclaimer is here to say that it is not necessarily "immersion". Rather than an immersion in gameplay, this chapter proposes that the intra-action of avatar and gamer demonstrates a particular emergence of posthuman subjectivity. In this chapter I therefore look to some of the previous definitions of empathy and consider how this humanistic trait might be posthumanised. What I mean by this is that there are certain definitions or understandings of empathy that suggest that the connection with the other should always be marked by a distinct knowledge that the "other" is separate from the self (e.g. Coplan 2011). It is understood as empathetic to be able to understand and acknowledge the feelings of others; but to actively put oneself into the others' position is seen is detrimental and potential leading to a psychosis wherein the empathiser cannot understand the difference between self and other. I argue that this is a humanistic understanding of empathy which is not necessarily the way in which the avatar and gamer subjectivity is experienced. Here, the empathic state that one enters into with the virtual mind and body of the avatar is specifically characterised through the ability to take on the bodily and motivational keys to the avatars "existence" into oneself in order to give it "life". This is what Banks and Bowman (2016) speak of with regard to an avatar that has its own perceptible sense of self and thing-ness. Although we understand that the avatar is not "our self", it is not necessarily a dangerous symptom that we begin to feel so much in alignment with their world that

we should be concerned with a psychological breakdown. However, even in this view that grants agency and qualities to the avatar, the notion of character attachment is seen through identification, control, suspension of disbelief, and responsibility. All of these suggest a higher degree of autonomy on the part of the "human' actor in the relationship even whilst suggesting that the closest connection between avatar and gamer to be that of 'unification, in which the player and avatar are indistinguishable' (Banks and Bowman 2016: 1259). This chapter therefore instead argues that a posthuman empathy recognises that there is no primary subject, and instead demonstrates the ways in which empathy emerges through a network of interacting forces and demonstrates our entangled, malleable and fluid state of being.

The third theme of subject formation presents a further broadening of the concepts that were demonstrated through acting and empathy. The first two themes move through more text-based interactions with the game (how the game shapes us and our behaviours) to more affective experiences (how empathy is viscerally experienced in relation to the embodied, situational experience of the avatar). Although I initially use these chapters to posthumanise a traditionally humanistic practice (acting) and feeling (empathy), the third theme broadens this to our own understandings of self. It also accounts for the ways in which these typical understandings of self through the desire to achieve, be attentive, and develop, were apparent in the game. The occurrence of these humanistic desires was troubling in a posthuman analysis, and I therefore used this chapter as an opportunity to posthumanise these themselves.

As I continued to play the game more and began to feel more at ease with the role of a researcher and my own documentation of the process I began to realise that some of the things I failed to document were the more mundane or trivial aspects of gaming. In an attempt to document the lived experience of gaming I was in fact missing out some of the ways in which I actually experienced or navigated the game, and through noting these in more depth I began to document these moments explicitly. The ways in which the game was not always utterly "immersive", enthralling or captivating allowed other activities to take place alongside gaming. Habits such as eating, having the TV on in the background, looking at my phone, and switching screens to look something up about the game online were all parts of the experience of gaming. More than this I realised how other seemingly "ordinary" feelings or actions bled into the

game, as I began to become frustrated by repetitive activities, and to experience feelings of nostalgia when looking back on the lifecycle of my avatar and our time in the game.

The very fact that I had not initially written these experiences down made it apparent that they were "undesirable" feelings; not something I should draw attention to, but something to shy away from, or hide. This demonstrated the ways in which the expectations of the liberal human subject were still shaping my experiences and my understanding of self, even within this context. Some of these (previously undocumented) actions show the ways in which even our habits and mundane time-wasting activities are posthumanised and demonstrate our entanglements with technologies – looking things up online, or reaching out through social networks. In other ways, through feelings of nostalgia and a reflection of the lifecycle of the avatar it shows how the technologically mediated versions of ourselves are experienced with as much of an emphasis on linearity and progression as our own physical bodies. Just because Etyme exists within *World of Warcraft* where I can revisit anywhere I have previously been, this does not mean that in our revisiting as that same material-informational subject we have not changed. Whilst feelings of nostalgia and the lifecycle of our shared posthuman subjectivity was an unexpected part of the gaming experience it is in some ways nevertheless an unsurprising symptom, as the mechanics and narratives of the game structure – and those of many other games – work explicitly towards this through the way games mirror everyday experiences and emotions. Thus notions of the "good citizen" are transferred onto the expectations of the "good gamer" – both in the game and outside of the game we are expected to progress and achieve, and to experience the desire to better ourselves.

These experiences create an inseparability of "game world" and "real life" and also has implications for the way we understand the status of gaming in real life. The concept of gamification, for example, suggests using game techniques in work and life in order to give one motivation and rewards for carrying out certain tasks. But the point of view that the game and real life are resolutely implicated in the creation of one another means revising how we understand the concept of gamification. Rather than viewing gamification as the process of applying game contexts to real life we should instead remember that the mechanics which games employ are in fact originally from "real life", and the reason we do most things in life is already for some sort of reward or

progression and games simply follow this "real life" structure. It is also worth mentioning that there is nothing particular "new" about gamification either – Gregg (forthcoming) has demonstrated how housewifery manuals included time-based competitions that we would now label as gamification – this is a method that has always been engaged with as a part of "human nature" and "getting things done". As games are therefore designed to allow us to develop, grow, achieve and earn, it is not surprising that the posthuman subjectivity we experience should also be felt to have a past, a growth, and a history, as that is exactly how the game is designed. As such a posthuman nostalgia is implicit within the experience – and is an intriguing aspect as it emphasises how much different moments impact us. By drawing on these experiences I was therefore able to retrospectively critique certain feelings as belonging to humanist expectations of self, and to therefore consider what a posthuman perspective of these "goals" might be.

Whilst these three themes seem to demonstrate clear entanglements of avatar and gamer, whether through performative, empathic, or fundamentally subject forming encounters, it is important to note that this entanglement is not unproblematic. Barad (2003: 808) states that '[a] posthumanist account calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of "human," and "nonhuman," examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized'. Drawing on this notion I suggest that a particular stabilising/destabilising is at play in the three themed chapters. They suggest a destabilising of the "boundaries" of human and non-human that are then stabilised through their intra-action with one another. Those "boundaries", that were originally considered as firm, fixed borders that separate the "self" from the "other", are instead re-read as performative in themselves. Rather than the avatar and gamer as a "being" they also quantify a "doing" in this context, and it is through our specific entanglements that we are re-stabilised (given our particular "individuality") through what we can do. In the themed chapters of acting, empathy and subject formation this "doing", this destabilising and restabilising seems to, for want of a better word, "work". Whilst the chapters demonstrate that this isn't always easy, pleasurable, or fun, the entanglement enacts a specific agency, a way to intervene. This rejects the idea of the human as a stable entity, but can clearly show how, when entangled with the avatar and gameworld, what agencies and possibilities for action occur.

One last caveat: destabilised subjects

It is important at this stage to make something else abundantly clear: just as the distinction between each chapter is a necessary tool to artificially separate analytical aspects from the experience of gameplay, so too the embodied and cognitive are not separate, though are presented in different ways throughout some chapters. The distinctions here are yet another construction of the narrative, in order to make explicit and clear the ways in which the experience of gaming has affective capacities that change the subjective state of being.

The turn to affect has been seen as one that has encouraged an expansion of the concept of what is integral to our being (Paasonen et al. 2015). Moving away from a Cartesian privileging of the mind over the body has however been met with some unfortunate symptoms – namely that in an attempt to re-establish the importance of the body and its affective capabilities, at some points there has been an opposite dualism employed by privileging the body over the mind (Paasonen et al. 2015: 5). In some ways this is an imperfect but sometimes necessary symptom of documenting experience – in order to account for mind and body in a coherent, structured way it is at times necessary to enact a "cut" in the research to separate them. It would therefore be true to say that there are parts of the analysis sections in this thesis that do, at times, employ a temporary distinction between my embodied and cognitive experiences simply in order to more carefully and clearly layout the process. These are the drawbacks of attempting to account for what we think and feel in a written document. However, my accounts do not attempt to privilege either; rather, throughout the fieldnotes and the analysis the combination of mind and body has meant a constant intermingling. The performative, empathic, and mundane aspects of gaming and the creation of a posthuman subjectivity are all experienced as a psychophysical thing – being of both mind and body.

This is an unfortunate, yet necessary, part of the construction of a PhD thesis. Calls to create accounts which are more fluid in style or structure, thereby creating what could be considered a more "accurate" portrayal of lived experience and subjectivity, are hard to negotiate when in the midst of a PhD research project which requires a format which renders it readable, critique-able and adhering to certain guidelines. The

result is a construction of a clear, linear, narrative, which is not the lived experience but rather a post-script of imposed structure and editing. Similarly, this chapter, which lays out how the themes link to one another is a further construction – there is no neat narrative as the themes intermingled and are experienced in tandem so much, but this chapter looks for those links which might begin to string the themes together despite the lack of a neat narrative. Furthermore, whilst the themes of acting, empathy and subject formation demonstrate three ways in which this specific posthuman subjectivity is facilitated, it should be noted that these themes do not encapsulate the "whole" of the experience of gameplay or posthuman subjectivity.

Haraway's (2003) work on companion species gives us a useful frame to consider the avatar-gamer through: she considers the concept of species as 'a series of contingent categories whose boundaries are in flux and whose substance is not essence but dynamic relationality' (Hayles 2006: 16). This enables us to see how the boundaries that are in flux around the human coupled with Hayles's "benign" posthuman (allowing 'a recognition that agency is always relational and distributed' (Hayles 2006: 16)) can help us to see how the avatar-gamer might demonstrate both how species flux and agentic coupling or sharing are in force. When the boundaries between the avatar and gamer are felt to shift into a more ontologically separate being then this is not to say that the posthuman subject has disappeared or ceased to be, but that the distributed agency has shifted to a different relation, and this flux can disrupt the previously established subjectivity. In fact, this simply demonstrates the fluidity of subjectivity that I have discussed throughout this thesis and shows how our posthuman states are not confined to a relationship with just one "other" but that instead we are always variously intra-acting and creating with and through the things around us. Barad (2003: 817) states that

> [i]t is through specific intra-actions that a differential sense of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency […] The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity in the ongoing reconfiguring of locally determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries, properties, meanings, and patterns of marks on bodies.

In the dynamic intra-action between avatar and gamer the sense of being that is enacted through the themed chapters of acting, empathy and subject formation is one set of configurations and agency. Elsewhere, when this is disrupted, the relationship is perceived to be reconfigured, with the agency flowing (or apparently not flowing) differently.

I take inspiration here from Lather (2007) in her suggestion of doubled meanings and getting lost in the research. Citing Derrida's charge to create a text that 'interrupts itself and gathers up its interruptions into its texture' (Derrida commenting on Levinas), she proposes using a Deleuzian 'plateau format to fold and layer concepts in ways that are multiple, simultaneous, and in flux rather than presenting them as linear and discrete' (Lather 2007: 4). This is my hope also for my thesis – that although the chapters are a necessary construction in order to thematise and draw conclusions form the data, both here and in the previous chapter I highlight how such linear and "neat" writing does not show how the themes overlap and intermingle. Similarly, the use of the "strategic I" is a multifaceted I, with no specific individual to whom it refers but rather a constant multiplicity (see Chapter 3: Embracing Methodological Contradictions, for more discussion). Lather (2007: 12-13) advocates getting lost in the research:

> the concept of getting lost functions as a paradox. It is a means of critiquing a certain confidence that research must muster in the audit culture. It is a metaphor for a new generation of postcritical work (Hoy, 2004). It is a way to engage a new interdisciplinarity that is able to question not just the nature of knowledge but its grounds of practice in postfoundational times. […] Given Derridean theories of the interminability of knowing in the face of the ineffability of the known, new losses are incurred by the necessary stabilization of science.

I have drawn inspiration from the above quote to question and query the conclusions from my research. This is the distinction that Lather (2007) makes between "lovely knowledge" and "difficult knowledge", where lovely knowledge represents neat

narratives and coherent structures that have been passed onto us from our humanist constructs of self and research. Difficult knowledge, by contrast shows us how impossible our representations of knowledge are. But, according to Lather, it's only by giving up lovely knowledge that we experience 'the promise of thinking and doing otherwise' (Lather 2007: 13).

I hope that the initial chapters of this thesis (Chapters 1-4) have demonstrated my awareness that the following three themed chapters (Chapters 5-7) depict a coherent yet complex (and partial) telling of the experience and justification of its philosophical conclusions – that we can posthuman humanist concepts but also that posthuman subjectivity "works" even when complicated. This could also be related to Lather's notion of "doubled" deconstructive logic, which recognises that '[a]uthority becomes contingent' (Lather 2007: 14). She therefore advises interrogating our own writings in order to "unmaster" our conclusions – critiquing our original ideas in order to present an opposing reading[28]. Lather also cites this approach as a way of circumventing the representation of a unified, humanist subject – the "difficult" chapters, disclaimers and contradictions in my own thesis are at times necessary in troubling the authoritarian, humanist voice which might appear to seep through the rest of the chapters. They emphasise my not-knowing and the knowledge of at least some aspects of the un-individualised understandings which might be at play in and amongst not only the data but in my reading of them.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the themes that have arisen through the gameplay and have been applied to an analysis of the fieldnotes. Posthumanised, these themes of acting, empathy, and subject formation aim to offer tangible examples of how a posthuman subjectivity might be both facilitated, and made sense of. As I have discussed in this chapter, these themes are not perfect, and enact a specific entanglement of avatar and gamer. However, they demonstrate how humanistic practices might be posthumanised,

[28] 'Doubled logic […] endorses a problematic attitude, a double reading that is both critique and complicity, a way to move beyond inside and outside. Key to a different logic, it is "the double necessity of working from within the institutional constraints of a tradition even while trying to expose what that tradition has ignored or forgotten" (Nealon, 1993a, p. 101)' (Lather 2007: 14).

so that a posthuman subjectivity might not only be a *being* but also a *doing*. This framework therefore paves the way for further humanistic practices to be reconceived in order to embrace a posthumanly ethically way of being. Further, this chapter has also served as a disclaimer to state that these themes do not account for all of the experience of the specific avatar-gamer subjectivity under consideration, and that aspects of posthuman experience can have a jarring affect and effect.

Embracing these moments, and accounting for them in this thesis is necessary in order to avoid presenting a techno-utopic account of the MMORPG or the posthuman experience. Being posthuman can be performative, can be empathic, and can even be caught up in humanistic understandings of subject formation – as Badmington (2003: 21) states "the 'post-' of posthumanism does not (and, moreover, cannot) mark or make an absolute break from the legacy of humanism'. These experiences are in constant conversation and flux with one another. The next three chapters offer a particular view of this posthuman experience, but one that I hope is as honest as a constructed, posthuman subject can aim to be.

Chapter 5: From Acting to Intra-acting

Introduction

I have claimed that the MMORPG avatar-gamer demonstrates one of the many ways in which our bodies are entangled with non-human "others". In doing so I have argued that to see the avatar merely as an extension does not account for the complexity of this relationship between human and machine. Instead, by taking a posthuman perspective we can consider the disruption that occurs between the notions of "self" and "other" in this example of an augmented body or bodies. The entanglement between avatar and gamer has many counterparts through different intra-actions of non-human and human, and is therefore only one example of how we can view posthuman subjectivities as our lived experience. My question is, how can we understand posthuman subjectivity as emergent and distributed, and how can we analyse the ways in which it is experienced?

In the following chapter, I draw on specific acting theories to analyse the avatar-gamer and consider what these theories can tell us about being posthuman, and forming new subjectivities. I examine fieldnotes and consider these in light of various ideas and techniques taken from Stanislavskian and Chekhovian acting practices. My background in performance and acting has allowed me to see the potentials in these often humanistic theories' to be reconceptualised in a way that aligns with posthumanist approaches. I therefore discuss how we might begin to "posthumanise" such techniques, drawing on entanglement and post-anthropocentrism. This is the first theme that I demonstrate has the capacity to be "posthumanised" in this thesis.

In doing so, I recognise that although there are problems viewing certain types of performance as posthuman, there are also many potentials. I therefore demonstrate how performance helps illuminate posthuman entanglements and vice versa, how posthuman ideas can illuminate performance practices[29]. This also allows a reconsideration of the relationship between actor and character, and could therefore have further implications within theatre studies.

[29] I do not use the word practices here to denote a sociological meaning, but instead to identify acting as a particularly specific profession or engagement.

I begin by offering a brief overview of other forms of posthuman performance that have previously been explored. As Kroker (2012: 1) states, '[w]e are literally drifting through many different specular performances of the body' and I suggest that the embodied gamer represents one such performance. However, in order to examine this notion of performance in more depth, this chapter seeks to address posthuman performance from a different perspective, specifically focusing on the idea of a posthumanised acting theory. I therefore then move on to explain my own posthumanising of traditionally humanist acting theories, before applying this to fieldnotes that demonstrate an analysis of the posthuman subjectivity experienced in the game.

Previous explorations of posthuman performance

The concept of "posthuman performance" has gathered attention from various fields in the past few decades, as performers find new ways of disrupting the sanctity of the "self" in various ways. Examples include works that question authorship, and focus on process (see Wood 2012 for her work on a collaborative method of devising); the fragmentation of self and our inherent strive for wholeness (see Scheer 2012 for an analysis of *Scenario*, an immersion in an Advanced Visualisation and Interactive Environment); and those that augment and adjust the body of the performer through machinic interventions (see Paul 2002 for analysis of Eduardo Kac's *Time Capsule* where Kac implanted a microchip into his leg and registered himself as both "animal" and "owner" in an online animal identification database originally designed for tracking lost pets). There has been a recent swathe of performances that integrate advanced technology into their productions, and these range in style and substance across both large and small theatre companies. Examples include the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2016-2017 production of *The Tempest*, produced in collaboration with Intel to present the first ever holographic character of Ariel, to smaller companies such as Pipeline Theatre's show *Spillikin*. *Spillikin* features a "robothespian", a 'life sized humanoid robot designed for human interaction in a public environment' (Engineered Arts 2017) as a device to explore our increasing intimacy with machines by presenting the subject matter of a man who creates a robot replica of himself to keep his wife

company when he dies. Theorists and practitioners have explored everything from extreme physical augmentations (Stelarc's *Ping Body* as an obvious example, which played with the notion of distributed agency; Stelarc's body was attached to a robotic device that converted "pings" from internet users who interacted with the art online into physical movements) to their digital counterparts (such as Orlan's *Self-hybridation* series, see Gomoll 2011 for discussion). Causey's (2006: 51) work discusses the potentials of posthuman performance through virtual spaces whilst arguing that '[p]erformance theory fails postorganic and posthuman performance […and] [p]ostorganic performance fails performance theory'. Accordingly, Causey (2006: 51) invites us to rethink the ontology of performance to extend it into virtual domains, but to remain critical of postorganic performance.

Further links between technology and performance have been made by a variety of practitioners in insightful ways, exploring aspects such as liveness and presence (e.g. Auslander 1999), space and time (e.g. Brooks 2010) and virtual and physical embodiment (e.g. Broadhurst 2012; Ford 2007; Kozel 2007). Some have argued that the integration of certain forms of media distort the very ontology of performance; Phelan's 1993 text *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* argued that '[p]erformance's only life is in the present' and that to record or document performance betrayed and lessened it's promise (Phelan 1993: 146). Meanwhile, others have demonstrated the very effective (and affective) integrations that have been created between performance and technology, from Blast Theory's *Can You See Me Now*, an online and offline "chase" game where runners in the physical world would try and track those who were navigated a map of the same space online, to Chunky Move's *Glow*, an interaction between dance and response projection technology (see Klich and Scheer 2012; Giannachi 2004; Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006 for more examples and analysis).

In his book *Digital Performance*, Dixon (2007: 601) considered aspects of overlap between digital games and performance and surmised that it was possible to 'draw close correspondences readily between theater [sic] and videogames'. He argued that the similarities extended through aspects of narrative, character development, and tasks or missions that are time based and in specific environments (Dixon 2007: 601-602). Elsewhere, Parker-Starbuck's (2011: 4) work on cyborg theatre 'provides one mode of analysis for these integrations' between performers and technologies, drawing

on the subject as an already fragmented and hybridised being. Her work is influential in that rather than focussing on the technologies as the focal point of "cyborg" performances she is instead intrigued by the relationships that occur when bodies and technologies are in close proximity to one another (Parker-Starbuck 2011).

These latter works are similar to my own work using posthumanism to theorise the relationship between avatar and gamer. However, in theorising the posthuman I am drawn to explore how we can analyse posthuman subjectivity in a way that sheds light on how our intra-actions operate and are experienced on a more "individual" scale (whilst equally arguing such individuality is a problematic proposal). Where Parker-Starbuck (2011), for example, examines the relationality that different forms of cyborg theatre embody in their work, my focus is on how such relationality is experienced from within those intra-actions. Causey (2006: 47) asks pertinent questions, such as '[w]hat are the processes of performance and performativity in virtual domains?' but in the following chapter I examine my own autoethnographic fieldnotes to instead consider "what are the processes of *posthumanism* in virtual domains?" and suggest performance might be one answer to this complex question.

Popat and Palmer (2005: 50) suggest that in collaboration between performance and digital technology, 'if the technology is integrated into the performance (and vice versa) then the two will be simultaneously readable through their creative synthesis'. This suggests a rhizomatic treatment of different components; rather than viewing technology as a gimmick or as a separate entity in performance we should 'experience such work as a fusion, not a con-fusion, of realms, a fusion that we see as taking place within a digital environment that incorporates the live elements as part of its raw material' (Auslander 1999: 42). This "creative synthesis" and "fusion" is the aim of both the actor in synthesis with their character (aiming to integrate the "technology" of the script and stage into their performance), and the gamer in synthesis with the avatar (and the mechanics of the game).

This synthesis can be viewed in posthuman terms, acknowledging and embracing the inseparability between notions of self, other and environment, and displacing the boundaries and differences that are implied between "binary" categories of human and non-human (Braidotti 2013: 89). The 'displacement of the lines of

demarcation' that Braidotti (2013: 89) refers to could easily be applied to, for example, the lines that "separate" avatar and gamer, but also the lines that separate actor, character, script, director and so on.

As previously stated, situating a study of posthuman performance in an MMORPG gaming environment is important in accounting for a form of digital augmentation that is widely accessible and available, yet has strong potential for deep philosophical explorations. Furthermore, exploring gaming as an example of posthuman *performance* has much potential, and a variety of examples and angles could be employed. Whitlock (2004; 2005), for example, explores the comparisons between forum theatre and MMORPGs and MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler (2011) look specifically to the role playing aspects of *World of Warcraft*.

In my research, rather than focussing on the interaction between performer and audience the focus is instead the intra-action between avatar and gamer as a posthuman entanglement, and (in this chapter) how acting theories might help to analyse this experience and demonstrate what practices facilitate the emergence of this specific subjectivity. Drawing on acting theories, I examine the ways that the avatar-gamer provides us with an example to clearly consider the entanglement of "self" and "other", in order to demonstrate how these categories are not ontologically distinct. By applying the work of theatre practitioners Stanislavsky and Chekhov to fieldnotes gathered from my autoethnographic immersion in *World of Warcraft* I am able to analyse this (posthuman) gaming practice in performative terms, and in doing so demonstrate how we might rework traditionally "humanist" approaches such as acting theory (focussing on, for example, mastery, autonomy, and control; explored in more depth below) in order to account for and analyse entangled relationships. I draw mainly on the work of theatre practitioners Stanislavsky and Chekhov not because they are the only practitioners whose work is relevant or applicable – far from it – but because considering my fieldnotes in response to their work allows for an analysis that demonstrates the complexity of the entanglement that occurs between intra-acting agents. It could also be argued that such an analysis could enable posthumanist ideas to be applied retrospectively to acting theories, thus demonstrating their ability to be "updated".

Below I aim to provide a theory of posthuman acting that negotiates the agency that "performers" experience as being both beyond and between the self, inseparable from the context in which they operate.

Posthumanising acting

Constantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938) and Michael Chekhov (1891-1955) were two theatre practitioners whose work on acting methods were among the first to explore the work of the actor as one that incorporated the character they wished to portray in a "psychophysical" way. Stanislavsky is hailed as the father of modern acting techniques for his work in moving acting towards a more "naturalistic" style. Requiring his students to draw on their own "emotion memory" in order to embody particular states of mind, his later work then followed with the "Method of Physical Action" which incorporated the importance of a physical dedication to a particular role (Gordon 1987). All of his techniques were designed to create a synthesis between actor and character, such that the performance became a culmination of their commitment to the part (see, for example, Stanislavsky 1937). Stanislavsky hailed Chekhov as his 'most brilliant pupil' (Merlin 2001: xx), and Chekhov's work continued to explore the possibilities of the creativity afforded through a physical and psychological commitment to embodying a particular role.

What do these techniques have to do with posthumanism, and what can they tell us about the avatar-gamer? It is my suggestion that these examples of the consideration of acting theory from the late 19th and early 20th century can be used to analyse comparatively what is taking place between the avatar and gamer and thus shed light on how posthuman subjectivity is experienced as distributed and intra-dependent. In the following, I outline my approach to posthuman acting as an analytic device.

To consider approaches to acting as posthuman is not without its problems, due to their historic placement in a humanistic culture, embedded with 'the values of liberal humanism – a coherent, rational self, the right of that self to autonomy and freedom, and a sense of agency linked with a belief in enlightened self-interest' (Hayles 1999: 85-86). However, I believe there are certain potentials that make it worth pursuing. As Causey (2006: 51) states, '[w]hat the mediated technologies afford performance theory

is the opportunity to think against the grain of traditional performance ontology' and as such, this chapter reconsiders certain ideas inherent within performance studies and acting theories, whilst drawing on others. For example, certain acting philosophies draw heavily on the influences of external stimuli and train an actor to be open to the stimulus provided by audiences, environments and others. In his advice to those creating a character, for example, Chekhov (2014 [1953]: 31-32) instructs actors to follow the characters' 'emotions, desires, feelings, thoughts; open yourself to it so that its inner life will influence your own inner life'.

These methods, therefore, begin to capitalise on some of the aspects of posthumanism discussed above, embracing the entanglement of the actor and actively asserting that a performance is the culmination of a variety of intra-acting elements. Stanislavsky's work could also be considered to have some posthuman characteristics as he states that '[t]he fundamental aim of our art is the creation of this inner life of a human spirit, and its expression in an artistic form' (1937: 14). To draw on Hayles' (1999: 3) definition of the posthuman as an 'amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction' (1999: 3), we might consider the "creation of this inner life" as the amalgam of "material" body of the actor and the "informational" script being brought together with the actor 'consciously creating the character's circumstances that are suggested by the playwright and director […] unconsciously placing himself in the character's world, feeling his real feelings, […] embodying the physical and emotional character' (Gordon 1987: 53-54). This suggests a sense of the intra-dependence between actor and character that might be ideally sought in performance.

However, one of the main problems with a view of performance or acting as posthuman is that although the actor is guided to draw on and incorporate aspects beyond the "self" (as above, incorporating the character's circumstances, suggestions from the director, and embodying specific emotions), there is still a sense of the actor being in control, a rational subject at the centre of this negotiation, *consciously* creating the character: 'all action in the theatre must have an inner justification, be logical, coherent and real' (Stanislavsky 1937: 46). There is a sense in acting that the desired state is a performance that comes "naturally", a synthesis of each element of

performance seamlessly integrating or, I would suggest, intra-acting. We can see this through Stanislavsky's (1937: 13) assertion that 'it all moves of its own accord, subconsciously and intuitively'. On the one hand, Stanislavsky (1937: 13) declares that '[w]e cannot enter into that [subconscious] realm'. However, there is a suggestion in actor training that certain techniques can be applied to 'elements which *are* subject to consciousness and will', and that '[t]hese accessible parts are capable in turn of acting on psychic processes that are involuntary' (Stanislavsky 1937: 13, my emphasis). Stanislavsky (1937) therefore proposes that the work of an actor is partly controlled by the conscious decisions and actions that the actor takes, but is also open to subconscious, involuntary creativity. Furthermore, Chekhov (2014 [1953]: 2-6) states that one of the requirements of the acting profession is 'complete obedience of both body and psychology to the actor. […] Only an indisputable command of his body and psychology will give him the necessary self-confidence, freedom of harmony for his creative activity' that again suggests an emphasis on more humanistic approaches. Elsewhere, Stanislavsky (1937: 267) suggests that when acting it is:

> necessary to have a pilot to direct us. As you become more experienced you will find the work of this pilot largely automatic. Suppose an actor is in perfect possession of his faculties on the stage. His mood is so complete that he can dissect its component parts without getting out of his role. They are all functioning properly, facilitating one another's operations. Then there is a slight discrepancy. Immediately the act investigates to see which part is out of order. He finds the mistake and corrects it. Yet all the time he can easily continue to play his part even while he is observing himself. Salvini said: "An actor lives, weeps and laughs on the stage, and all the while he is watching his own tears and smiles. It is this double function, this balance between life and acting that makes his art."

This idea of a pilot, able to dissect the component parts of a performance and acting in perfect possession of one's faculties is, of course, a highly humanistic view, suggesting rational and conscious control: an actor able to correct and regulate their

performance. This demonstrates the somewhat contradictory sense of autonomy that is prevalent throughout some acting theories – the actor both reliant on their subconscious, but attempting to "control" it – '[o]ur subconscious power cannot function without its own engineer – our conscious technique' (Stanislavsky 1937: 15).

A conception of posthuman acting would, therefore, complicate this idea of the actor being the master of their art and instead focus on and extend the aspects that destabilise notions of "self" and "other" between the actor and their character and environment. This enables a reading of Stanislavsky that views his ideas of the creative work of an actor as an emergent posthuman subjectivity, an intra-action of character, actor, environment, director etc. where each entity influences and is influenced by the intra-actions that have formed them and the performance is an emergent embodiment of these entities in harmony. For example, Fauconnier and Turner (2008: 266) state that dramatic performances are deliberate blends of the life of the actor and the life of the character. This "deliberate blend" could again be considered to constitute Hayles' (1999: 3) posthuman amalgam.

In the below sections I utilise the potentials of posthuman acting. Drawing on particular instances of gameplay that demonstrate the enmeshed and extended sense of being of the avatar-gamer entanglement, I analyse these in relation to specific examples of acting theory and demonstrate how we can "posthumanise" these theories further. This enables an analysis that doesn't simply claim the gamer-as-posthuman, but that begins to consider how we can make sense of such experiences. Drawing on the ways in which the avatar-gamer relationship goes beyond merely objective interactions between "self" and "other" I show how the subjectivity that arises is instead a complex, embodied, intra-action between different components. In a posthumanised view of performance, the avatar is more than a tool or external counterpart, it is an implicit component in the agency that is possible. This is an important aspect of understanding the subjectivity between character/actor or avatar/gamer not as components wherein one entity "represents" the other on stage or in game, but where these entities rely on one another for 'the conception and birth of a new being – the person in the part' (Stanislavsky 1937: 312) or the posthuman subjectivity that emerges from and through this phenomenon. In the second part of the analysis I then consider how the fieldnotes demonstrate the "blurring" between the roles that each component embodies. Viewing

the capabilities of avatar and gamer as only arising through their intra-action with one another I therefore demonstrate how the complication of "self" and "other" in this relationship is an apt example of how these bifurcations are false.

Entangled with Etyme

My own experience in performance began at a young age when I performed in a series of variety shows and pantomimes from around the age of 10, before going on to study for graded LAMDA (London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts) accredited exams in 'The Speaking of Verse and Prose' and 'Drama'. I continued with these exams for around 10 years, completing the LAMDA Certificate in Speech and Drama: Performance. Alongside these exams I undertook firstly my GCSE in Drama, then a National Diploma in Performing Arts at college, and a degree in Performance Studies and Drama. I have performed with various theatre companies over the years and during my PhD. The experience that I have spanning over 15 years and my performances of roles on stage grants me some embodied understanding of the relationship between actor and character, and taking part in both acting and gaming alongside one another has allowed me particular insights on how the two practices relate to one another. However, beyond this natural inclination, I have tried to provide explicit examples that demonstrate an analysis of the posthuman practice of gaming in performative terms.

There are some basic and useful correspondences that should be mentioned when considering the performance of actor and gamer (see Laurel 2013 for a comprehensive overview of the performative aspects of human-computer interaction). For example, although, as stated above, I do not specifically explore the interaction (or intra-action) between the audience and the performer, in an MMORPG that comparison is possible. Whereas single-player games are often played in isolation (although this trend is changing with the increasing popularity of channels dedicated to footage of "play-throughs" that follow a gamer's journey through a game) the MMORPG allows real-time spectatorship of other players, as you inhabit the same (virtual) space. The MMORPG environment therefore allows an "audience" to view the portrayal of an

avatar[30]. There is evidently an element of "performance" from this perspective too when avatar-gamers stand in front of avatar-gamers and enact certain pre-defined "emotes" in game, such as dancing or laughing. Furthermore, the initial gameplay set up could be used by the gamer as a form of "script" – it offers insights and information about the "backstory" for gamers to glean knowledge about their environment, race, class etc. and how this might go on to inform and shape their gameplay.

The "RPG" of MMORPG refers to role-playing game, and in *World of Warcraft* different playing styles are accommodated in different "realms". In player-versus-environment (PvE) realms the player is, as the name suggests, playing against the environment – monsters and non-playing characters. The second playing style is player-versus-player (PvP), where players of opposing factions can attack each other at random within certain areas of the gameworld and without having to formally challenge one another or enter battlegrounds or arenas that are specifically designed for that purpose. In role-playing (RP) realms there are extra social rules for players to adhere to that are specifically in place to enhance the sense of consistently acting out or performing a character. My own gameplay takes place in PvE realms, with extra involvement in PvP battlegrounds. However, as I discuss below, the integration of different histories, geographies and aesthetics afforded to different races and classes within the game provides ample backstory for the avatar's role, without the use of a specific "role-playing" realm.

Another overlap between theatre and games is the phenomenon of "pronoun play" that occurs between character/actor, avatar/gamer slipping between referring to the character or avatar variously as "I", "she", "we". Hand (2005: 215) explains this blurring of objective and subjective as 'how the multiple dialects – external versus internal, objective versus subjective, active versus passive and so on – are complicated in the worlds of performance and gaming' thus demonstrating again the ways in which these positions are reliant on one another[31]. The below fieldnotes expand on these initial overlaps to analyse the gaming experience through specific themes that relate to acting theory.

[30] This therefore demonstrates the applicability of Goffman's (1990 [1959]) dramaturgical analysis of the presentation of self to online contexts.
[31] For further analysis of pronoun play in gaming see Burn and Schott (2014).

Knowing the part

Another of the initial ways in which both game mechanics and gaming experience are similar to the work required to perform a role on stage are the ways in which both gamer and actor must familiarise themselves with the part they are playing.

In order for an actor to be able to play a part "correctly" one of the most important things, according to Stanislavsky (1937), was for them to first of all study the text in depth to understand their character's "given circumstances". These are the circumstances given within the script of the play, and tell both actor and audience the situation in which the story of the play takes place. They are 'the facts, the details for which there is no discussion. They are your foundation for building a character' (McGaw et al. 2007: 154). The actor will also go through the script in order to learn more about their individual character, judging by what they say and how they act, as well as gleaning information from what other characters say *about* them. These "given circumstances" give the actor an insight into the world of their character, their temperament and personality.

We can see how this relates to the initial foray into *World of Warcraft* through the character choices that you are given at the beginning of the character creation. The opportunity to choose from a series of different races and classes is facilitated through the on-screen information available from the game which gives an initial insight into how these choices impact on the role and background of the avatar (see screenshot below).

The way in which Stanislavsky discusses the engagement with the given circumstances for a particular role when acting can be considered in relation to gaming. Stanislavsky (1937: 51-52) states that the given circumstances provided by the play and the specific production you are are a part of provides a general outline of the character and their circumstances, and that in order to perform "sincere" emotions for that character you must believe in their life 'and then become so accustomed to it that you feel yourself close to it'. In the same way, when a gamer is confronted with the initial information provided by the game this shapes the whole playing style that is enabled through those choices. Whilst it may not be necessary to embody the whole backstory of a race (as we will see later in this chapter) it is nevertheless essential that the player understands the different roles that those races and professions play in order to choose a character that embodies a particular playing style (for example whether one wants to play as an attacker, a healer, a magical being, etc.).

The initial choices of what and how to play were something that I was unsure about myself and this is apparent in my fieldnotes. The below extract is from the first fieldnote that I wrote, and briefly explains the way I chose my avatar race and class:

> *As I log in and the game begins I am prompted to create a new character. Already the story begins to surround me, as I read the different specifications of*

character types and class. I feel sure that some players carefully research their character choice, reading up on the abilities of them all. I, however, have read Johnstone's (1981) book, Impro*, and after a cursory read of character specifications, I decide to go with my initial instinct, rather than thinking things through too heavily. […] I decide on a Blood Elf, and customise my character, editing skin colour, face, hair style, hair colour and even earrings. I am pale with green slightly glowing eyes, and I take on the class of "Hunter", a ranged attacker. Finally, I choose a name.*

***

I'm not even sure if I am lying to you. I'm terrible at making decisions; for every decision I make, I know I will have the worry of whether it was the right one. Improvisation promotes spontaneity as a rejection of society's expectations of you which make you question the legitimacy/appropriateness of your choices and actions (Johnstone 1981: 75-108). I would like to think I go with my gut. In fact, the process is probably more heavily influenced by society than I care to admit.

As Stanislavsky (1937) states, the study of the script and the given circumstances is in order to come to know the part an actor is playing intimately. As the above fieldnote suggests one of the ways in which the concept of given circumstances differs between performance play and gameplay is that through performing a play you already know the situations that you will navigate as a character, whereas in gaming there is no immediate way of knowing this. You are given some initial information and much visual stimuli but the act of getting to know the character in gaming differs from the traditional choosing of a role in most acting experiences as the role is not already laid out. In the type of acting I am discussing here, the script is already laid out, the main events are already set in stone and therefore the characters' journeys are pre-defined. There are choices to be made for each performer to consider how they might enact the given circumstances and embody them, and each performance will adjust in

line with a particular artistic vision from director, producer, environment etc. (for example, some theatrical productions may choose to update the time or place that a play was originally set, such as many Shakespeare performances that are reconceived for a contemporary audience). Nevertheless, the events remain the same. In *World of Warcraft*, the potential events may be fixed by the game mechanics, but the choice as to which you will engage with, and where you might end up, are much more open – there is 'a greater capacity for emergent action in the contingent space opened up between the player and rules of the game as they play' (Ash 2012a: 12). Whilst some things must progress in a linear fashion, the open world style means that no two journeys will be the same. Therefore, although there are certain "given circumstances" available much of the circumstances evolve throughout gameplay, and the gamer cannot know all of the circumstances as, unlike in a play, they are not yet fixed, and constantly evolve with game updates. However, the importance of the basis of the circumstances you *are* given in the game are still fundamental – as stated above, choosing to play as a Blood Elf Hunter enables a particular playing style and range of quests that another race or class would not experience.

In order to understand *World of Warcraft* and the game that you are engaged in it is necessary to understand your role. Gaining knowledge about the world, the game, the class and race of your avatar and the background of *World of Warcraft* is something that many players continue to do throughout their gameplay, via forums and avenues outside of the game itself as well as in game. The notion of given circumstances is an intriguing aspect of acting to consider from a posthuman perspective. On the one hand this notion might be seen to demonstrate humanist ideals of knowledge and self-mastery, however, it could also be considered as an example of being open to influence from "external" factors, thus demonstrating a permeable being that could be conceived as post-anthropocentric through its intra-action with these "non-human" factors. We can see this fluctuation between the ways that the actor is either in control of, or constrained by, the character in the following statement:

> [i]n the analysis phase, you are making conscious decisions about every aspect of your character. In rehearsals, however, you simply know who "you" are. This

> leaves you free to explore objectives, to work against obstacles, and to make tactical decisions through the eyes of your character. (McGaw et al. 2007: 155)

To consider this from a posthuman perspective, I draw on Pepperell. Pepperell's analogy is that "the human" has a "fuzzy" edge, 'profoundly dependent into its surroundings' (2003: 20). He states that 'where humanists saw themselves as distinct beings in an antagonistic relationship with their surroundings, posthumans regard their own being as embodied in an extended technological world' (Pepperell 2003: 152). By arguing for an acknowledgement of our reliance on and intra-action with our environments, Pepperell (2003: 22) claims that 'we can never determine the absolute boundary of the human, either physically or mentally. In this sense, *nothing can be external to a human because the extent of a human can't be fixed*' (original emphasis).

The above fieldnote is also interesting in its illumination of the multiplicity of selves that are experienced in the game as it begins to move between different positions – initially exuding a certain confidence, it then moves into a more reflexive style, before acknowledging that the idea of improvisation being free from societal bounds is problematic. Whilst these sections do not illuminate a particular aspect of posthuman performance, they nevertheless demonstrate the multiple subject positions that occur in and throughout the fieldnotes, and the impact of external influences on the "choices" that are made in-game. This therefore demonstrates the same ambivalence between analysis and performance raised above.

Blending roles beyond the script

The relationship that I have built with my avatar is one that acknowledges our ability to act within the game as arising from our entanglement. The fluctuation between the "me" and "she" is constant, a we/she/me/I negotiation that never quite stabilises, and I have written about these experiences elsewhere (see Wilde 2015; Wilde and Evans 2017). From a posthuman perspective, and drawing on Barad's (2007) work in this area, the sense of difference that occurs when an "I" or "she" is employed is not something that separates "subject" from "object" or "self" from "other" but is in fact implicit within the entanglements of components. As Barad (2007: ix) states, '[i]ndividuals do

not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating'. As such the idea of the "human" as being a separate entity, removed from or "pre-existing" society, culture, others, technologies etc. is flawed. However, through our specific intra-actions with other entities in specific contexts, a particular set of potentials emerges and this creates a sense of "individuality" amongst components. Thus, the sense of agency I experience is contextual: 'distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action' (Barad 2007: 33). What I can do in game is only possible through the avatar, and vice versa. Our capabilities therefore emerge through our intra-action with each other.

The subjective relationship between avatar and gamer is also interesting in the way that it develops. These relationships are specific to the entities that form them, and my own imagination plays a vital part in personalising that experience as I creatively read characteristics into the avatar[32]. This is demonstrated in the following fieldnote:

> *When I log in I watch Etyme for a while, not for the first time inspecting her animate body. The avatars in* World of Warcraft *aren't usually completely still – if you stop "controlling" their actions they do not freeze, statue-like, but instead stop, human-like, with some small movements, some restless presence at play behind them. Etyme always strikes me as somewhat haughty when I watch her, a bit aloof with a somewhat bored demeanour. In a way I find her actions kind of… cute. It's kind of like she is waiting for me to come and adventure or play with her. She's not keen on the standing around admiring how good we look – there are things to be done out there! As I write this I realise just how much of a character she is to me, the kind of life she has taken on of her own.*

Reading this in performance terms it is illuminating to consider how Stanislavsky (1937: 52-53) theorised the work of an actor:

[32] This also aligns with Ferreday's (2009: 13) claim that the real and the imagined are mutually constitutive.

> we bring to life what is hidden under the words; we put our own thoughts into the author's lines, and we establish our own relationships to other characters in the play, and the conditions of their lives; we filter through ourselves all the materials that we receive from the author and the director; we work over them, supplanting them out of our own imagination. That material becomes part of us, spiritually, and even physically; our emotions are sincere, and as a final result we have truly productive activity – all of which is closely interwoven with the implications of the play.

These ideas are indicative of the process by which my relationship with Etyme develops. Taking on board the story of her Blood Elf race as a proud people, resilient and ruthless, and the requirements of her class (Hunter) could be considered as the "words" and "lines" of the game, the "script" and in our incorporation certain aspects have been "brought to life". Linking this to Stanislavsky's above quote suggests that I have "worked over" the integration of certain physical moves and gestures that the game has provided the avatar with, for example tilting her head or shifting her weight, and I have "supplanted" them with a "haughty", "aloof" and "bored" demeanour, and a personality[33]. For me, this negotiation between the avatar, gamer, game mechanics, and game narrative is akin to the negotiation between the character, actor, director, writer, and script. Both create the epitome of the posthuman subject – Hayles' (1999) amalgam, an assemblage of different parts that are interwoven and come together both through materiality and information that are in constant flux and negotiation. However, it could be argued that such an analysis again falls back into humanist ideals, as Stanislavsky's words suggest a rationality and mastery over these incorporations of the "other". Again this demonstrates the tension within the analytic of posthuman acting that I acknowledged above. Some aspects of Stanislavsky's (1937: 52) work seems to rely heavily on our entwinement with stimuli (e.g. 'that material becomes a part of us') but still embeds an anthropocentric view of these incorporations.

If we instead consider the characterisation of Etyme as that which has arisen

[33] This is representative of Stanislavsky's earlier work that focussed more on the mental analysis and preparation of an actor, whereas his latter work moved to more embodied methods rooted in adopting the physicality of a character.

from our entanglement, we can view this in a posthuman way. In a similar way that Blackman (2012: 46) proposes the 'self has been decentred and distributed, destabilized, disrupted, fragmented and *aligned with process*, rather than the localization and organization of inner structural determinants' (my emphasis), so too is the posthuman subjectivity emergent and based within particular contexts and intra-actions. Although referred to as separate from the self in sections of fieldnotes (through the use of "her", "Etyme", "she") I also refer to how good "we" look. Furthermore, as Barad (2007) argues, phenomena are the intra-action between elements, but without the one, the other one does not exist. It is through their intermingling that certain qualities come to light. As such it might be suggested that the shifting of the avatar body that is read by me as a "bored" and "haughty" demeanour demonstrates one way in which the character becomes an enactment or posthuman subjectivity that 'emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating' (Barad 2007: ix). This posthuman subjectivity is, therefore, an example of "phenomena" – the 'ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting components' (Barad 2007: 33).

This sense of the adjustment of avatar and gamer in alignment with one another, building a subjectivity or "character" that arises from their intra-action, continues throughout gameplay in a variety of ways. In gaming, there has to be a sense of the avatar and gamer's goals being incorporated, and elsewhere in this thesis (Chapter 6: Enacting Empathy) I consider this as an empathic flow between the desires of avatar and gamer (see also Wilde 2015; Wilde and Evans 2017). My own experiences of these goals being aligned are often most evident when there is a sense of proficiency within the game:

> *In anticipation of entering the battleground, standing around with the other players I switch my helmet, gearing up for the battle ahead. This act somehow heightens my anticipation, making me feel more prepared and eager. When we are able to cross the threshold and enter the battleground, it takes me a moment to get used to it, to the mayhem of running around and attempting to attack enemy players. Warsong Gulch is a capture the flag type battleground and so there are no bases to be fought over. […] What strikes me during this*

> *battleground is how long it takes the enemy players to take me down when they attack me. Usually I fall quickly, seemingly, as other players flood to attack me. But in this instance I seem to be holding my own somehow – oh of course inevitably I die, don't get me wrong. But there is a significant pause as I stride purposefully backwards, shooting my attackers with swift blows and unleashing my beasts upon them. I "disengage" by hitting the "=" button and leaping backwards away from those who hound me, putting crucial distance between us.*

We could consider this as a form of what Stanislavsky terms "living the part". He states: '[t]o play truly means to be right, logical, coherent, to think, strive, feel and act in unison with your role' (Stanislavsky 1937: 14). Although this could be viewed as problematic through its apparently humanist execution (being rational, and seemingly "in control") we can nevertheless see posthuman potential here. Viewing the part not as an "other" but as an entity whom the actor is entwined with, the artistic "performance" demonstrates the inability to separate actor and character. Stanislavsky (1937: 14) continues that the actors'

> job is not to present merely the external qualities to the life of this other person, and pour into it all of his own soul. The fundamental aim of our art is the creation of this inner life of a human spirit, and its expression in an artistic form.

Again, although the idea of a "human spirit" could be perceived as problematic to a posthuman reading through its anthropocentrism, the acknowledgement of the importance of this "non-human other" (i.e. a fictional character tangible only through the script) could be explored as an example to understand the potentials for the way in which '[p]osthuman subjectivity reshapes the identity of humanistic practices, by stressing heteronomy and multi-faceted relationality, instead of autonomy and self-referential disciplinary purity' (Braidotti 2013: 145).

Such stresses on heteronomy and multi-faceted relationality are demonstrated by the ways in which the gamer is influenced and implicated in the webs of connection

with “others” within the game, guided by quests, non-playing characters, and affects. This is akin to Stanislavsky’s analysis of a “fully creative actor” as one who consciously incorporates the suggestions of the playwright and director, and embodies the character physically and emotionally (Gordon 1987: 53-54). I suggest that such work embodies an entangled, distributed, post-anthropocentric and therefore posthuman performance. Furthermore, the “I” that occurs in the fieldnote here refers to an “I” arising from the avatar-gamer entanglement, and does not indicate any sense of separation between “human” or “non-human” elements (in the same way that the theatrical entanglement of character and actor becomes an emergent “I” that is an incorporation of both). In comparison to the earlier fieldnote this demonstrates the multiplicity of selves or “non-unitary identities” that the fieldnotes incorporate.

Read through performance terms, in acting, all of the work on the character and the engagement in their life, feelings, moods, rhythms and ways of navigating the role can, in an ideal scenario, lend the actor to feel a sense of kinship and “oneness” with the character. They will say whether or not they feel that their character would do this or that, and feel themselves intimately connected with the role: ‘[y]ou will be able to detect in your characters those fine but fugitive features which nobody but you, the actor, can see and, as a consequence, reveal to your audiences’ (Chekhov 2014 [1953]: 5). The above fieldnote demonstrates the ways in which I have found Chekhov’s “fugitive features” within Etyme, accepting and embracing these and incorporating them into a construction of “self” that arises between material and immaterial entities. In the same way as an actor distinguishes these features in a character, opening oneself up to such influences is readable as a form entwined, post-anthropocentric posthumanism. By viewing our entanglements as the lack of an ‘independent, self contained existence’ (Barad 2007: ix) we can see how posthuman subjectivity is a mutual construction. More than just inter-acting with an “other” this builds a subjectivity that is intra-dependent on other components, without judging their part as less worthy because they are “less human”.

In the same way, the lines that divide script and actor, actor and director, character and actor in the performance of a character in the theatre might also be considered to be unhelpful separations. Posthumanising performance in this way has interesting implications for our understanding of acting theories, which have called for

a blurring between "self" and "other" in performance even without the label of "posthumanism" being applied. As McGaw et al. (2007: 155) state:

> [s]tage productions that contain living, vital characters result from a melding of the creative talents of the actor and the dramatist. Any argument over which of the two is more important is fruitless because they are completely interdependent. The actor relies on the character created by the dramatist to provide an essential, continuing stimulus and source of inspiration. On the other hand, without the actor to bring it to life, the dramatist's character will remain dormant on the pages of the script. The final creation is the result of a true collaboration – a marriage of sorts – between actor and dramatist.

Although this suggests a more anthropocentric approach – focusing on dramatist rather than character per se – it does demonstrate some sense of the intra-dependence at play. I would extend this argument to the actor and the *character* as its own entity. The theatre performance might also therefore be considered an example of 'entangled material agencies' (Barad 2007: 56) where actor and character and dramatist are intra-dependent on one another. To explore the entanglement of the actor and character in the theatre along these lines would trouble the notion of a pre-existing subject-object divide of "the performer" and "the performed". Instead, it is only through performance that a boundary-drawing practice occurs, 'that make some identities or attributes intelligible (determinate) to the exclusion of others' (Barad 2007: 208). If, as Barad (2007: 208) states, '[p]henomena are inseparable from their apparatuses of bodily production' then we might extend the above analysis in order to demonstrate that the phenomena of the character is inseparable from that of the performer. However, this is then equally applicable vice versa, as what makes the "performer" intelligible in their own right is also a form of *relational* ontology that produces '"objects" and "subjects" and other differences out of, and in terms of, a changing relationality' (Barad 2007: 93). Future research might therefore further explore the application of posthuman subjectivity and the relevance of Barad's (2007) notions of intra-action in the entanglement of the actor

and character (and other entities included in the performance, such as write, director, costume, make-up, props etc.) in theatre.

Story and circumstances

One aspect of gaming that adds an interesting dimension to the experience and can be considered in relation to given circumstances and the performance of an acting role is the level of engagement with the narrative. As I will explore in the next chapter that considers empathy with the avatar as a driving factor of what creates the posthuman subjectivity, the engagement with the narrative can lend a different quality to the experience.

> *I play in a dungeon, which is one that I haven't played in before. It has an interesting narrative where you are accompanying a human and fighting mobs [monsters] that attack him. Everyone is forced to stand around as the human delivers his narrative, unable to continue until he (the NPC) is ready to. It is quite refreshing in this way as having played in a new dungeon yesterday, where I was unsure what was going on as I did not have time to read the story, this makes a change. I get the impression that other players do not appreciate this in the same way as another player writes in the chat box "he has a lot to say doesn't he?". It is hard to know when other players have less interest in the story whether they have simply played the dungeons before, and are therefore less interested in hearing things for the 50th time. For myself, I know that wanting to hear the story the first time around, or read it, is very important to understanding the objectives and the motivation for the level. However, once I have done the level once, listening to it again holds little interest. This goes back to what makes a play session feel meaningful, and whilst the narrative can contribute to this when it is the same narrative repeated it has the same effect as when mobs regenerate after defeating them – it serves only to highlight the futility of the quest and reminds the player that they have no lasting effect on the game world. […] The dungeon has also been interesting as although the narrative was led by the NPC who we followed the initial quest giver*

introduced it and I was unable to read the full blurb as the rest of my group had already run off.

As the above fieldnote demonstrates, the engagement with the narrative differs for many different players, and for me is an important part of the experience to understand why I am doing what I am doing. From this it is apparent that I am attempting to engage with the avatar and the story in a way which echoes Stanislavsky's (1937: 46) statement of playing truly by being "logically" and "coherently" involved in order to know my part and be in unison with my role. This is often discussed in relation to justification and the idea that '[e]verything that happens on the stage must be convincing to the actor himself' (Stanislavsky 1937: 129). Although I do not necessarily agree that such a "commitment" to the role is necessary in gaming, or, indeed, in posthuman subjectivity where commitment, logic and coherency would be seen as more humanist constructs, it does demonstrate some of the humanistic desires for rationality that still pervade certain parts of our existence. Whilst I believe these humanist desires for coherency proliferate our everyday experiences, a posthuman reading needs to complicate these and question whether such coherency can ever be achieved, or whether it is simply a fallacy.

An example of a Stanislavskian practice that demonstrates this tension is that magic if:

> as an actor breathing life into a character in a completely fabricated "secondary" reality, you must enter into the magical world of "if." You must say to yourself, "*If* these clothes upon my back were real, *if* this space actually existed at this particular time, *if* I were this person with this distinct personal history who had these perceptions, biases, desires, fears, and relationships, this is what 'I' would say. This is what 'I' would do." […] With the help of this **"magic if,"** however, you can **suspend your disbelief** and enter into this new world with greater enthusiasm than you believe in your own reality. *If* allows you to part from your own plane of truth and enter into your secondary reality as a new person. You cannot create another existence without *if*. (McGaw et al. 2007: 2, original emphasis)

On the one hand the creation of this other existence could be considered to be a posthuman subjectivity, moving beyond the "boundaries of the self" to incorporate different reactions to external stimuli, environments, and situations, and understanding how they affect you. As the above fieldnote demonstrates, my own entanglement with the avatar seems to be experienced more richly if I feel that I become entwined not only with my avatar, but also with the narrative and the gameworld. This might suggest that the notion of the "magic if" requires me to know what the story is so that I can consider how to respond accordingly (in order to answer "how would I respond to this situation?" the more information you have about that situation, the better equipped you might be to answer the question). However, from a posthuman perspective we must complicate this further, focussing not only the permeability that the "magic if" suggests, but also troubling its inherent anthropocentrism and its focus on a more cognitive process.

Rather than viewing the role of the "magic if" as an individual's willing suspension of disbelief and application of a conscious and controlled thought experiment, we can instead consider this as an example of the affective capabilities that are shared between entities. If we acknowledge that we do not always control and direct the "magic if", but instead that the possibilities and potentials of an "external" character's situation have affective and empathic (as we shall see in the next chapter) qualities, we can view this as a demonstration of how entangled we are and how different agentic possibilities emerge. The "if" is therefore experienced in a way that does not only locate the conclusions to the scenarios of '*[i]f* these clothes upon my back were real, *if* this space actually existed at this particular time, *if* I were this person with this distinct personal history' (McGaw et al. 2007: 2, original emphasis) in the "self" of what "I" would say or do, but also outside of the self.

Being "caught up" in the game

> *Having previously decided to move on from my current location and travel to higher (level) ground (what an awful joke) this is the exact opposite of what I*

actually find myself doing. That almost literal draw backwards captures me in its current and when, upon completing one quest, I am offered another I am drawn in. This one seems to be the completion of this string of quests though (or so I tell myself) as I am offered the chance to ride into battle alongside the creatures I have been working with for some time now... Of course I accept, and on completing that quest am offered another... It's nearby so of course I am tempted. I leap onto my wind rider (there is no leaping, only "summoning", a careful mustering movement of my hands and the wind rider appears, Etyme atop it). We fly the short distance to the next unbeatable foe and in one strike, fell it.

***

I enter a new zone on the map and realise that not too far away there is a quest awaiting me... I hover my mouse over it and realise it is defeating Cassandra Kaboom [a non-playing character] in a pet battle – a low level quest that I never managed to complete, as my pet battles were not good enough and at the time I was more focussed on levelling myself than levelling them. What was that I was saying about needing to get on to other places and higher levels? Looks like I will be distracted once again, the lure of completing this quest that is so near working its way on me...

This fieldnote demonstrates my involvement with the game and the avatar and shows my subjective experience in both the circumstances of the world, the quests, and my involvement with Etyme. 'When true theatre is taking place (and this is the goal of Stanislavski's new method of acting), "the actor passes from the plane of an actual reality into the plane of another life"' (Fortier 2002: 48) and these notes from gaming demonstrate how this happens too to the gamer. I am drawn into my involvement with the game and again my agency is not a possessed quality but an intertwined set of potentials arising through the game and the avatar.

Furthermore, it's also interesting how the interpretation of the agency of the avatar is perceived in terms of their characteristics, and the ways in which as a gamer

you can either contradict this with your actions or you can work with it. The choices of the game are limited by the programmer/designer/hardware/game mechanics/narrative etc. to name but a few. I would suggest that the game narrative and game environment have agential affects upon my experience as a user that guide me towards particular decisions and choices and away from others. This is in keeping with not considering agency to be a possessed quality, but rather as a series of intra-acting intra-dependent notions each influencing each other. This, therefore, accounts for the ways in which the production of the game, the environment and sounds and aesthetic of where Blood Elves start their *World of Warcraft* journey, and the narrative of the game, have all stayed with me and almost guided my opinion of Etyme. I cannot claim that these "opinions" are my agentic choices. Instead, I have been influenced by all of the other intra-acting components. This demonstrates another way of understanding the intra-action between different performative entities in a posthuman conception of acting. Rather than viewing the actor as a carrier of agency, exerting their control over the character, we instead see that the choices of the actor are precisely emergent through the equal "agency" of the character. If we understand agency as a doing or being, or an enactment that is enabled through different entities intra-acting, we can see performance as precisely this. Performance enables "action" through a negotiation and emergence between different possibilities for "becoming" when actor and character entwine.

An example of this is demonstrated in the below fieldnote, which reflexively considers agency in the game and with the entangled avatar-gamer:

> *It's also interesting how the interpretation of the agency of the avatar is perceived in terms of their characteristics, and the ways in which as a player you can either contradict this with your actions or, what is more likely, you can work with it. I'm thinking of the ways in which I view things as being appropriate or not to Etyme. On the one hand that could be considered as my agency overpowering that of the avatar, but I don't experience it that way or feel that to be the case. Instead, I suggest it is an agential intra-action amongst entities. So the production of the game, the environment and sounds and aesthetic of where Blood Elves start their* World of Warcraft *journey, along with*

the narrative of the game which tells a complementary story to this, have all stayed with me and almost unconsciously guide my opinion of Etyme being quite at one with nature. This is reflected in my own choices – e.g. clothing Etyme in browns and greens and greys, organic colours, but under closer inspection I cannot claim that these are my agentic choices. Instead, I have been influenced by all of the other intra-acting components.

Whilst this analytical fieldnote could demonstrate the ontological inseparability of the avatar-gamer, the incorporation of different influences might also be related to Stanislavsky's (1937: 14) proposition of an actor needing to feel and act in unison with their role. I suggest that such work 'stresses radical relationality, that is to say non-unitary identities and multiple allegiances' (Braidotti 2012: 144) to embody an entangled, post-anthropocentric and therefore posthuman performance. Although in some ways the performativity of the avatar is limited (it is not completely customisable), in other ways this makes players more inventive with them, and makes even small moves significant. Stanislavsky's (1937: 15) work highlights the need for both internal and external commitment to the role, stating that '[a]n actor is under the obligation to live his part inwardly, and then to give to his experience an external embodiment' and the negotiation between these is obvious in the above extract. Tronstad (2011: 250) has discussed the importance of appearance in terms of "identification", 'how we perceive a character is how it appears, and vice versa […] appearance is not something that is static but is fundamentally connected to performance'[34].

In acting the focus on appearance is not about "identifying" with the character as a separate entity, but more an embodiment of the character that is often one that becomes apparent through the performance of the role, taking on certain physical characteristics and considering how their visual portrayal of the character is as important as their vocal or emotional one. As Stanislavsky (1937: 15) explains, an actor

[34] Whilst Tronstad (2011) uses an analysis of appearance and capacity to consider how much player's "identify" with their avatars, in the following chapter I view this as an empathic relationship. Rather than considering identification as a process that either occurs through empathy with an "other" or through considering that "other" as "self" my own, *posthuman* empathy aims to disrupt these distinctions, in much the same way as this chapter has.

must always give an externally visible performance, therefore the actor must focus as much on their outward portrayal of a character as their inner understanding of that role.

In gaming this is experienced differently, as part of the embodiment of the character is made manifest through the avatar, a highly customisable and visually performative element. As such the aesthetic plays an important part:

> *I constantly review Etyme's costume/armour choices. It's treading a fine line between aesthetic vs. tactical. I don't want to look clumsily put together – there needs to be some level of consistency. This feels like as much for our benefit as for anyone else's. Just as in RL we dress to impress and gain confidence in our own construction of costume appropriate to the role we are trying to portray (performance of self), in much the same way the careful construction of appropriate attire here is both to afford myself confidence in my appearance and also to demonstrate to anyone who might encounter Etyme that we are taking this seriously. And in games we do need to take ourselves seriously.*

Another fieldnote indicates similar experiences:

> *I made various changes to Etyme's outfit yesterday and when I log in today I get the chance to actually admire them. She is mainly wearing deep rusty tones of red tinged with flashes of silver. I removed the helmet she was wearing – it provides good armour and is useful for battlegrounds but essentially looks ridiculous. Some of these new choices seem somehow sleeker too, less like she is dressing up in someone else's clothes. She looks more grown up, a real warrior rather than just playing at being one. Of course then I log back in and I'm a Noblegarden bunny for the Easter themed event.*

There is thus demonstrated an awareness of being looked at, and wanting to look well put together. In acting the importance of the incorporation of these "external" features is

also heavily involved in the realisation of the character. McGaw et al. (2007: 119) state that:

> [y]ou must also learn to relate to your character's clothing and to the imaginary environment. The character's clothing must be a part of your very existence. You must not treat your clothes as mere costumes that were recently hanging in the dressing room but rather as if your character personally selected them. Your work with your character's clothing will, in fact, communicate directly how your character feels about himself and his surroundings.

From a posthuman perspective, this focus on clothing is indicative of one of the very basic ways in which we do not stop at the boundary of the skin, and instead incorporate "other" materials into our sense and performance of "self". Moreover, it demonstrates an engagement with stimuli that disrupts a subject-object or internal-external binary. Such binaries might conceive of the costume or the avatar as a representation of the character (either theatre or game), whereas to extend Barad's (2007) notions of performativity over representation we instead see these "representations" as performative in themselves. This is not only a theatrical performativity, but a performativity through a doing or being. Clothing, costumes, or avatars each become a particular embodiment and enactment that enable certain subjectivities (such claims will be familiar to those who have studied the historically performative constraints of women's clothing). Clothing the avatar is an apt demonstration of this phenomenon – as the above fieldnote demonstrates, this is an "aesthetic vs. tactical" choice as what the avatar is wearing specifically enables different defences and attacks as they are not merely clothes but also armour and weapons. Similarly, the clothes we wear in everyday life enable certain subject positions and constrain certain abilities. In theatre, the costume plays a similar role. Costume is therefore another entity and aspect that a performance emerges through – it contributes to the available agency in terms of denoting what a character can be or do, and how it must be enacted. Whilst a full analysis of clothing as a demonstration of posthuman subjectivity is not possible here, this nevertheless demonstrates another avenue for posthumanism to explore.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how we might begin to analyse the lived experience of posthuman subjectivity in order to consider what practices and processes facilitate our intra-actions. Utilising acting theories to unpack the intra-action between avatar and gamer has shed light on how entwinement and post-anthropocentrism can be practised through performative collaborations where notions of "self" and "other" are abandoned in favour of an entangled posthuman subject.

We are shaped by our intersubjective experiences, as is the avatar, as is the character, as is, of course, the posthuman. The avatar as extended body has given us less that is "new" or unique than many would argue. As Tufekci (2012: 45) states, '[d]igital mediation changes everything, and yet it changes so little'. The avatar has simply provided a new form for our (posthuman) subjectivities to take, and new elements to analyse. However, these digital technologies have provided us with new motivation to understand our intra-actions with elements beyond the "boundary" of our skin. In analysing these in a context where the components seem obviously "external" only to uncover how entwined they are, perhaps we are then better equipped to turn these conclusions back to their non-technological counterparts and analyse other intra-actions in a similarly posthuman way.

This chapter offers an alternative and updated conception of performance, a "posthuman acting" that draws on some elements of acting theories but challenges others, accounting explicitly for performance as occurring from a de-centred subject (actor/script/director/producer) without the need for asserting the actor as the "master" of their art. Instead, viewing the performance as a complex entanglement of intra-acting components asserts a post-anthropocentric view, and therefore utilises posthuman acting as an analysis of the practices and processes through which posthuman subjectivity emerges. This has therefore demonstrated the ways in which we might perceive the work of Stanislavsky and Chekhov as historically shaped by their own (humanistic) circumstances, but that the principles behind their work can be re-applied outside those contexts and might be understood differently in the context of posthumanism.

This chapter does not argue that the embodiment of a game character is indistinguishable to the experience of embodying a character for the stage – whilst there are many overlaps these two experiences each have their own individual traits, and the gameworld is experienced differently to the stage. However, in the same way that the game requires the gamer to function, so too does the character require the actor, and so both "performances" can be seen as entanglements, where neither "gamer" nor "avatar", "actor" or "character" can be viewed in isolation from the other. Both can only come to be through an ability to give and receive, to affect and to be affected. When we consider these as traits that acknowledge our entanglements, we destabilise anthropocentrism. In doing so a view of our subjectivities as posthuman is made possible, and an understanding of the avatar/character as separate or "other" in either medium disappears.

In the following chapter I aim to extend these ideas further, considering not only how the performative practice of acting can be posthumanised, but also how we take these ideas and view them through the affects of empathy. Firstly, I will demonstrate some of the overlaps between performance and empathy, showing how the ability to engage with an "other" demonstrates the intra-dependence of "self" and "other" in the affective experience of empathy. I then move on to a critical engagement with the concept of empathy itself, considering how it too might once have been considered humanistic, but can be re-read with a posthuman approach.

Chapter 6: Enacting Empathy

Introduction

In the previous chapter I considered the potential of "posthumanising" certain acting techniques and therefore enabled an analysis of the posthuman subjectivity experienced by the avatar-gamer entanglement. Whilst that chapter provided an example of how a particular practice can be posthumanised, and how we might take some humanist examples of in*ter*actions and reflect on them instead as in*tra*-actions, the following chapter considers how we might view this outside of a performance context and move the exploration into a broader argument. There are links between empathy and acting that I explore at the beginning of this chapter, and this is why the analysis begins to move in this direction. Rather than only viewing the posthuman possibilities within a performative practice, this chapter considers how we might posthumanise empathy along similar lines.

In theatre there is an empathic relationship between the actor and the character and also between the audience and the characters. As we saw from the previous chapter, the ideal scenario in acting is for the actor to empathise with the character in order to deliver their experiences and emotions in the most "believable" way possible. To make an initial link to empathy, we could consider how this practice corresponds to the meaning of empathy as 'entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. […] It means temporarily living in his/her life' (Rogers 1975: 4). This is precisely the job of the actor who 'passes from the plane of actual reality into the plane of another life' (Stanislavski 1980 [1924]: 466). In the previous chapter some of the ways in which gaming can be considered similar to theatre were explored. Dixon (2007: 601-602) discusses the correspondences between the two, including aspects of time, narrative, characters and emotional responses. In this chapter I study these affective and emotional responses further, and consider: what are the shared qualities of the empathic connection with character? Having explored how acting can be posthumanised, I then consider the capacity of empathy to be posthumanised. I therefore initially discuss the empathic connection between avatar and gamer in relation to the actor/character and audience/characters in theatre, in order to

answer the question of how this manifests itself in the lived experience of MMORPG gaming.

Exploring empathy

Empathy is a concept that explains how we relate to each other in the world. Finlay (2006: 4) states that, '[w]hen applied to the human world, empathy is generally understood as 'entering another's world' or 'stepping into their shoes'. Empathy allows us to understand other's thoughts and emotions, and it has been theorised and used in a variety of ways. Rogers was a psychologist who began to make the initial links between empathy and psychotherapy. In one description he surmises that empathy

> means entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever, that he/she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in his/her life, […] in order to enter another's world. (Rogers 1975: 4)

This definition is illuminating for the concept of empathy in and of itself, demonstrating the affective-cognitive involvement involved in this relating. However, empathy is also an essential tool in acting. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Stanislavsky's work on acting methods emphasises the importance of feeling in attuned with the character. Stanislavsky (1937:14) states that the actor should 'think, strive, feel and act in unison with your role' and he highlights how an actor must come to know the character she is portraying intimately, moving beyond relaying words in the script to understand the motivating factors behind their character's words, actions and overall aim. Stanislavsky believed that it was the actor who emotionally identified with the experiences on stage who was fully creative (Gordon 1987: 53). This actor prepared by consciously and unconsciously incorporating all aspects of the character as suggested

by the script, the playwright and the director, and embodying the character (Gordon 1987: 53-54)[35].

One of the ways in which we can make sense of what occurs between actor and character is therefore through an *empathic* relationship[36], where the actor considers the situation that their character is in and thinks and feels in response to those "given circumstances". Therefore, in both empathy and acting there is a dual importance of affective *and* situational understanding and depth of feeling, which I return to below as the intra-dependent empathic experiences of affective encounters and narrative engagement through my own fieldnotes.

We might also consider empathy in theatre emerging through the audience intra-action with the performance. The audience should empathise with the characters and their situation in order to be carried into a willing suspension of disbelief: they should 'experience *vicariously* what the characters in the action seem to be feeling' (Laurel 2013: 145). This form of empathy is just as important as the empathy between actor and character, as the audience can still experience an affective response to the situation the characters find themselves in through the understanding and recognition of the characters' circumstances and emotional states (Wilde 2015: 141).

I believe these initial overlaps between acting and empathy demonstrate how we might begin to move some of the practices of acting, as a specific but narrower practice, to something more widely interpersonal such as empathy.

Further to "performing" the posthuman (as per the previous chapter), in this chapter I argue that empathy is one of the affects that emerges through posthuman subjectivity. Through the perspective and affective flow and exchange that takes place between the avatar and gamer (and character and actor) we can begin to problematise some of the more "humanistic" notions of empathy. What is meant by the "humanistic" attributes of empathy are the conceptions of empathy that are presented that suggest a rational, stable, autonomous individual takes part in "other"-oriented perspective,

[35] See the previous chapter for an analysis of the problematic, humanist, aspects of this instruction.
[36] Some work has been done to explore the empathic potentials in acting, for example, Goldstein (2009: 6) tests 'the hypothesis that acting training fosters strength in reading others' mental states, feeling others' feelings, and regulating one's own emotions in an adaptive manner' and Verducci (2000) considers the potentials for utilising acting techniques to cultivate empathy in moral education.

nevertheless with no "loss" of self taking place in the action of considering this "other's" perspective or situation. For example, whilst some perspectives suggest a fusion between the empathic subjects (such as Lipps' version of "feeling into"), other approaches suggest this to be problematic, as they believe empathy should not involvement a loss of self (such as phenomenologists Husserl and Stein's accounts) (Coplan and Goldie 2011: xiv). In this regard the self/other divide in some definitions of empathy is still problematic, as different views of empathy theorise different ways of being with and through the "other".

Such conceptions provide an interesting basis for a posthuman understanding of this affective experience. Rather than viewing fusion between participants as problematic, a posthuman conception would understand that "humans" are always in fusion with "others". The concern over a "loss of self" speaks from a very particular liberal human standpoint that suggests there was ever a "self" to "lose" in the first place. Furthermore, it clings to a "rational" self that has an autonomous agency. From a posthuman perspective this seems implicitly flawed when concerning the visceral nature of empathy, the unexpected way that it can affect us and move us. Affects such as empathy are one example that demonstrate that we are not entities that exist in separation or isolation. Our bodies are constantly being affected by our surroundings, atmospheres, or other bodies around us and we are therefore constituted by and through our responses to "external" stimuli, such that "external" becomes "internal" and such a binary therefore becomes unfeasible. Affect has always played a large part in acting technique, working hand in hand with embodiment of the role. Sensory perceptions are key to embodying a role and bringing it to life, and many acting exercises serve to highlight these links – such as Stanislavsky's (1937) methods of "Affective Memory" (also known as emotion memory), a process of an actor remembering a time when they felt something akin to the experiences of the situation their character is in and trying to relive those visceral affects when playing the part. It is through the sharing of affective experience that the empathic experience and acting experience is formed – it must be embodied. This therefore requires exploration of affective empathy and what could be conceived as Blackman's (2012: 82) 'instances of affective transmission'– automatic or involuntary bodily affectivity – and acknowledging that if '[l]ife is defined by the flow or exchange of a vital force – an élan vital – that connects rather than separates and is

felt and registered within the body through a subtle sensing' (Blackman 2012: 85) then this is precisely what occurs between avatar and gamer.

To a certain extent these forms of empathy can already begin to indicate one aspect of posthumanism at play. As Pepperell (2003: 20) states 'the apparent separation between the human and the environment is invalid in the posthuman era and, therefore, needs revision'. As such, when the actor empathises with their character and 'enter[s] the private perceptual world of the other' (Rogers 1975: 4) and the audience vicariously experiences the characters' feelings on stage, these practices begin to demonstrate the apparent invalidity of the separation between human and environment and other. Our ability to engage in such empathic practices, be they through acting or observing, therefore demonstrates the ways in which '[o]ur bodies consist in a complex matrix of senses that perpetually respond to the stimuli and demands of the environment' (Pepperell 2003: 20). From Pepperell's (2003: 21) perspective then, empathy would be just one of the many indicators of the instability of the concept of the "human", as it demonstrates that we are 'neither bounded by our skin nor isolated from the environment we are woven into, and woven of'.

As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the gamer of today sits somewhere between "actor" and "audience", as they have the capacity to both act in and view the action that takes place. This is particularly true of the MMORPG gamer – where the majority of the other inhabitants of the gameworld are other real life gamers, all capable of both watching and being watched (Wilde 2015: 141). From this perspective we might argue that empathy experienced by the gamer is more multifaceted than for an actor or an audience member, as it combines multiple aspects of both enacting the experiences of the avatar but also watching them unfold on screen.

The player develops a 'virtual persona that is something "other" than him/her represented onscreen' (Whitlock 2005: 199), and in this thesis I have already examined how we can consider that persona as an example of posthuman subjectivity (see Chapter 2: Proposing the Posthuman Gamer and Chapter 5: Acting to Intra-acting). In this use of the "other" Whitlock (2005) is not so much stating that the *avatar* is other – which would refute a posthuman view – but instead that what is co-created between avatar and gamer is not simply a representation and is more complex. For Whitlock

(2005), the time invested and the choices made when creating a character in MMORPGs is similar to that of the spect-actor of Forum theatre. In Forum theatre the audience become active parts in the performance, taking the place of actors and thus becoming spect-actors: a 'meld of audience and actor, […] an active participant in drama, influencing the narrative and altering it' (Whitlock 2005: 194). If we view the experience of the gamer as an empathic connection with their avatar, we could consider this "gamer empathy" both in terms of how the gamer *views* the action and how they *perform* the actions (Wilde 2015: 141).

Empathy has been explored in games previously, for example, Martin (2013) explores empathy in relation to experiencing a body in space. Smethurst (2015) considers the ways in which empathy in videogames might lead the player to experience a sense of trauma when realising they have committed, or been subject to, certain acts in-game that have affected them offline. Belman and Flanagan's (2010) use of empathy is more focused on an aspect that can be written into the design, usually of a "serious game", for use as a pedagogical tool. Elsewhere, Jin (2011: 1176) has 'hypothesized that people playing a prosocial character's role would experience greater empathy with the character than would those playing a violent character's role' as these character's might be seen to represent peoples goals or wishes, or their morality and obligations. These explorations, though interesting and insightful in terms of the capacities of what empathy in gaming might *do*, are not the aim of this chapter. In these studies empathy is usually considered as a tool that fosters immersion with the avatar as a wholly separate "other". In this chapter, I instead discuss the ways in which empathy emerges and ask: how we can consider this through a posthuman perspective?

I problematise empathy in relation to a bounded, wholly separate, specific "other" and consider how we can instead view it as an intra-active affect. By analysing a posthuman subjectivity through empathy, we can consider another possibility for how posthuman subjectivities are facilitated, as well as how we might posthumanise other practices.

In this chapter I therefore explore the visceral subjective nature of empathy in gaming; and the ways in which it arises naturally through *World of Warcraft*, viewing the avatar as a co-producer in the emergent posthuman subjectivity. The specificity of

the entanglement that I am exploring is again worth reiterating[37] – the humanoid avatar could be argued to facilitate such subjectivities in a more anthropocentric way. Martin (2013: 319) explains that 'the human form means the avatar retains the capacity to arouse pathos, admiration and identification', meaning we are able to empathise with the avatar as a character involved in a particular situation. Accordingly, the gamer's own body is then implicated in the action as '[e]mpathy caused by the response of mirror neurons to the game's audio-visual information activates the player's motor systems, recreating the conditions of the virtual world in the body' (Martin 2013: 317-318). This is not to say that such empathy does not or could not occur elsewhere, indeed a posthuman form of empathy as it is conceived of below most certainly could, but only to highlight that the way in which that is facilitated and experienced is contextual.

Empathy is therefore experienced both in relation to the situations characters ("real" or "fictional") find themselves in, and also in relation to said characters' affective and emotional responses. Tronstad (2011: 251) uses a continuum of empathic experiences derived from Vaage to encompass these feelings of involvement. In this model true empathy occurs between emotional contagion and perspective taking with aspects of both, and can be considered both in terms of embodied empathy, where the body of the gamer vicariously experiences what the body of avatar is subjected to, and narrative empathy, where the gamer's involvement in the situation and story of the avatar elicits an empathetic response (Tronstad 2011: 251). Although such conceptions might appear problematic through a perceived separation of such capacities, this is not the aim. As Vaage (2006: 32-33 cited in Tronstad 2011: 252) states: '[t]o some degree both embodied and narrative empathy are needed for an experience to be empathy'. Empathy is therefore conceived of as a spectrum of experiences. The emphasis on the importance of intertwined affective and cognitive experiences are similarly discussed in acting theory, as Chekhov and Stanislavsky continuously discuss the importance of the psychophysical:

> [i]t is a known fact that the human body and psychology influence each other and are in constant interplay. […] the actor, who must consider his body as an

[37] As per Barad (2007: 74) 'entanglements are highly specific configurations'.

> instrument for expressing creative ideas on the stage, *must* strive for the attainment of complete harmony between the two, body and psychology. (Chekhov 2014 [1953]: 1)

The affective, empathic moments that are explored in the following chapter are therefore both visceral and situational. Whilst the pre-discursivity of some understandings of affect might be criticised for imposing an apparent dualism between body and cognition, as the fieldnotes demonstrate this is not the case. Visceral encounters are cognitive and situational also – for example, falling would not be alarming were if not for the fear of harm or death and in this way 'rather than being separate or autonomous realms, affect and cognition are interdependent' (Ash 2013: 29).

Posthuman empathy

In the following sections, I address the need for a posthuman account of empathy. I draw on a particular line of thought in posthumanist theory that suggests a constantly permeable, fluid and extended subjectivity, which blurs the boundaries between human and non-human. In doing so, I ask, what might a posthuman concept of empathy look like? How can it be applied to fieldnotes produced through the intra-action of avatar and gamer? In doing so I show how empathy allows us to understand this subjectivity as constantly negotiated, producing visceral reactions in the intra-connected avatar-gamer subject. I explore moments of co-produced in-game action that require 'affective matching' between subjective and embodied experiences.

I believe a closer analysis of empathy could deepen accounts of the subjective effects of gaming, especially when applied through a posthuman lens. My aim in providing such an account is to reveal how the avatar-gamer relationship is a subjectivity created through an intra-dependence between subject and screen.

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, the definition of gameplay as posthuman does not make sense of the very visceral emotions that take place. In the rest of this chapter, I propose that a posthuman concept of empathy might be one analytic to

help analyse the posthuman condition and offer us ways of understanding these relationships in more rhizomatic terms. I argue that empathy is a useful concept in exploring the simultaneously imaginative, embodied and cognitive in our connection with the non-human "other". As I have begun to explore already, this understanding of empathy is therefore based on a more fluid application, whereby the binary between the cognitive and corporeal break down and intertwine.

However, as with acting, empathy is not an unproblematic concept to bring to posthuman analysis, as it similarly has humanistic traits. Below I consider how empathy can both reinforce and resist a posthuman reading, and I attempt to complicate its humanist foundations.

A recent shift in critical theory to notions of "affect" has emphasised the importance of empathy as an emotional interaction with another. Elsewhere, Braidotti (2013: 78) has written about the potentials for empathy to encompass posthuman ideals, through its morality and potential as a selfless quality, as well as through its focus on the emotional rather than the "rational" being of humanism. However, I would suggest that in defining a posthuman empathy we need to be wary of the problematic humanist traits that the term "empathy" might indicate (Wilde and Evans 2017: 6). For example, Coplan's (2011: 5) account suggests that common uses of "empathy" have made definitions ambiguous, often co-existing with similar terms and states. With this in mind, she aims to provide a clarification in terminology that is, as she terms it, 'conceptually cleaner' (Coplan 2011: 6). Informed by psychological and neuroscientific research, Coplan (2011: 5) defines empathy as a 'complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological state while maintaining clear self-other differentiation. To say that empathy is 'complex' is to say that it is simultaneously a cognitive and affective process'.

Coplan's (2011) definition of empathy has been a useful starting point. The simultaneity of cognitive and affective processes is demonstrated in my own fieldnotes, and is appealing through its resistance to the singularity of cognitive or affective processes. Equally, I was drawn to Coplan's (2011) definition of empathy given the centrality of imagination, which I recognised in my fieldnotes. However, it could be argued that certain conceptions of empathy are fundamentally at odds with posthuman

subjectivity. Coplan (2011) states that empathy is a 'human-to-human' concept that requires 'simulating' the other's 'psychological state' but 'maintaining clear self-other differentiation'. This means that the empathic subject would remain distinct, maintaining the problematic discrepancies implicit with the concept of the liberal human subject (Wilde and Evans 2017: 7).

From this perspective empathy might be considered a human "essence", and it is at this point that what I term posthuman empathy in gaming diverges most radically from Coplan's definition, as this disrupts Coplan's (2011) suggestion that self-other differentiation is essential to empathy. According to Coplan (2011: 15), 'when there is insufficient self-other differentiation due to a breakdown of the boundaries between the self and others' true empathy cannot occur because '[t]he observer recognizes that the other is a different person and successfully adopts the other's perspective but ends up experiencing the other's perspective as his own'. Coplan (2011: 16) believes that clear self-other differentiation is important as

> [w]hen we lack this awareness [of our own selves as separate agents], we lack clear self-other differentiation, which in this case results in a kind of fusion or enmeshment. As Michael Stocker and Elizabeth Hegeman [1996: 116] explain, when individuals are enmeshed, 'boundaries between them are too porous or nonexistent, each is too caught up in the life of the other, too involved and overly concerned with that person'.

However, this "enmeshment" is perhaps most accurately what occurs in games that the player finds themselves immersed in – each is entirely dependent on the other in order to take any action within the game and therefore bring caught up in one another's life is almost a necessary prerequisite. This makes the notion of self- or other-oriented perspective taking in empathy somewhat troublesome. Coplan (2011: 9) argues that self-oriented perspective-taking is when 'a person represents *herself* in *another person*'s situation' (my emphasis), whereas in other-oriented perspective-taking we imagine being *that other person* undergoing their experiences, rather than involving our "self" or imagining our own experiences and characteristics to be involved (Coplan 2011: 13).

This clear cut definition between self and other is problematic to the conceptualisation of empathy in gaming, as in gameplay the avatar is often not experienced in such definite and simple terms. Quite clearly the avatar is not entirely "self" – yet it is not entirely "other" either.

Posthuman subjectivity offers a way to conceptualise enmeshment as the boundaries between self and other are accepted to be complex or indeterminate, and that subjectivity is emergent and distributed, integrated within the world rather than operating from an established position outside of it (Hayles 1999: 291), whereas Coplan's version of self-other differentiation implies a fixed, stable perspective.

Linking this to Barad's (2007) suggestion of relational ontology that explores how entities only emerge from, and are defined by, their intra-actions, the previous chapter demonstrated how we can begin to conceptualise the posthuman subjectivity which arises between avatar and gamer as an entanglement, a phenomenon which indicates 'the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting components' (Barad 2007: 33). Such an explanation disrupts the notion that a clear self/other differentiation is necessary, and instead promotes the exploration of the amalgam. This amalgamated self is facilitated by the fact that the gamer is an active participant and contributor to the world and action around them. Returning to empathy, we could therefore argue that a sense of having empathy with the narrative is facilitated in this intra-action, as the gamer-as-avatar must action the events that unfold.

What would this mean for a *posthuman* empathy? Although empathy is an imperfect analytic, my definition of a posthuman empathy would include a) recognising the empathetic capacity of others who are non-human, including the empathetic capacity of the avatar, which is in keeping with my discussion of posthuman subjectivity, and b) acknowledging that such empathy only works through the network along a complex range of entanglements in multiple relationships with other actors (in this case avatar-gamer entanglements) (Wilde and Evans 2017: 7). It is worth stating that I am not suggesting that the avatar is an empathetic subject with the capacity for imagination in and of itself. This capacity is emergent, and only exists in relation to other parts of the entanglement, including the avatar-gamer one. A posthuman empathy would mean recognising that there is no primary subject, but that empathy is always

already an intra-connected network of dynamically intra-acting forces. This aligns well with traditional concepts of empathy, where empathy can occur viscerally between subjects, while sympathy, for example, might be understood as more one-directional (Wilde and Evans 2017: 7).

The recognition that there is no primary subject also complicates traditional definitions of empathy as 'the imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object so that the object appears to be infused with it' (Merriam-Webster 2017). Such a reading of empathy is again heavily humanistic, implying some sense of control over the empathy that is experienced[38] and granting all agency, imagination, and projection to the human and ignoring the qualities of the "object" that is in question. This chapter does not aim to enact such binaries, and instead views posthuman empathy as affective, embodied, and emerging from our intra-actions.

Whilst empathy can be enhanced, that is not to say it can be controlled, and a posthuman empathy refutes such anthropocentric qualities. Furthermore, although Gee (2008: 259) argues that avatars are "projective beings" and whilst he states that the avatar 'becomes a reservoir that can be filled with your own desires, intentions, and goals' he, significantly, elaborates that 'things work the other way round as well' as 'players inhabit the goals of a virtual character in a virtual world. […] you, the player, act in the game as if the goals of your surrogate are your goals' (Gee 2008: 258). Gaming is therefore an experience that is (at least) a two-way exchange between character/avatar and gamer.

Therefore, the notion of more than one empathetic subject engenders my first criteria of posthuman empathy. Although previous research has focused on our capacity to empathise with biological others (see, for example, Rogers 1975; Hoffman 2000; Coplan and Goldie 2011), my focus here is empathy that emerges through the material human-gamer and the informational technological-avatar (Wilde and Evans 2017: 7).

As suggested above, my concept of posthuman empathy is not complete, fixed or static. Nor would I argue that the empathy I explore in this chapter is limited to the

[38] Elsewhere Blackman (2012: 37) explains that in social psychology there was a shift 'between suggestion, as a form of contagious communication, and sympathy, understood as a form of conscious judgement and deliberation'. This seems to be a similar attempt to maintain a sense of rationality and control in order to "make sense" of affective encounters.

avatar-gamer relationship. Context necessarily shapes the cognitive-affective construct of empathy and different environments and entanglements create a different relationship (or form different phenomena) than the one in gameplay (Wilde and Evans 2017: 7). This could also be aligned with Bennett's (2010) analysis of the vibrant life of matter. Rather than the historical understanding of different materialities as passive in their engagement with the world, Bennett (2010) proposes a vitalism where objects are able "to act". Although not necessarily intentional or conscious agents, objects nevertheless have an affect on the world: the human and non-human 'always perform an intricate dance with one another' (Bennett 2010: 31). Considered in this light, a posthuman empathy might include, in the case of gameplay, the intra-action with a specific device, and the wired and non-wired technologies that enable online play. My argument therefore isn't that empathy exists *between* the avatar and gamer but that it emerges through the avatar-gamer entanglement[39]. However, as per the aims of this thesis, I focus specifically on the empathy that emerges through the avatar-gamer subjectivity as an example with which to explore these concepts in more depth.

In exploring empathy as avatar-gamer, I adopt Sundén's (2012) position of inseparable sameness and fascinated difference, but I view this as a horizontal and intra-dependent relationship, where both avatar and gamer coexist. The complex experience of empathy emerges in a variety of ways. At times, empathy is experienced as complete incorporation. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, at times in my fieldnotes the self/avatar become inseparable, with I/Etyme being used interchangeably. But at other times the "I" makes observations about Etyme, and vice versa. For example, Etyme responds when the keys are pressed; and yet at other times she seemingly "separates" from me by complaining that there's "nothing to target" (when I have not chosen a specific enemy to attack) or proclaiming "I'm not ready" (when attempting to make an attack without enough "focus", a Hunter resource that must be regenerated). In total incorporation, we might not find these effects. But if we understand empathy as a posthuman affect, we can read it as distributed, meaning that empathy is no longer a concept to explain "putting ourselves in someone else's shoes" only to return to the "safety" of our own bodies. Posthuman empathy instead

[39] This aligns with Ash's (2013: 29) assertion that 'affect does not simply operate *between* body and world on an unconscious level, but actively creates associations'.

demonstrates how humans and non-humans are entangled through their ability to affect and be affected by circumstances, environments, and feelings (Bennett 2010). Citing Deleuze, Bennett (2010: 21) suggests that 'the power of a body to affect other bodies includes a "corresponding and inseparable" capacity to be affected'. Likewise, my understanding of the avatar as active, agentic, and empathic recognises the vibrancy of non-human agency as an emergent capacity.

I use this concept of posthuman empathy below. In the first section of the analysis, I explore how a posthuman empathy creates moments of embodied experience, which appear to take place almost-instinctively. The second section describes how these empathetic relations are connected to others within the gaming environment. I then consider how aspects of cognitive matching do not always operate in ways we might expect through the game mechanics and game narrative. Finally, I suggest that this concept of posthuman empathy can be put to use when understanding the avatar-gamer relationship as a continuum, where the interaction between self and machine is more than incorporation of body and subjectivity. Where Sundén's (2012) work has shown how the player empathises with another player through the body of the avatar, I aim to take empathy further, through the empathetic relationship that is shared within the avatar-gamer subjectivity (Wilde and Evans 2017: 8).

Empathy as embodied experience

Empathy can be broadly understood as an affective response to what another is experiencing. In gaming this is often an "immersive" act in that the avatar body becomes what we navigate the world through. It is therefore felt not only to be an object of perception, but also a means of perception (Martin 2013) that involves an empathetic relationship where our eyes, for example, see through the avatar, but where equally the avatar sees through us (Clough 2000). An example of this would be how the avatar's position in gameplay highlights the potentials in the gameworld landscape that are interactive (e.g. objects, avatars, NPCs etc.) and "sees" the value and prospects that engagement with the interactive elements of the game could provide. Put simply, the player cannot act on or progress in the game without the avatar, but neither can the avatar without the player. The visual field is therefore intra-dependent, opening up the

complexity and heterogeneity of the perceptual and agential circuits through which posthuman subjectivity is experienced (Wilde and Evans 2017: 8)[40]. Similarly, when the gaming environment or mobs affect this avatar body, we find our own bodies affected along those channels of feeling: '[a]s any player knows, the rush you get from a good game is not confined to the space of the screen; it is a subrational, bodily thing as well' (Shinkle 2005: 22).

My fieldnotes demonstrate the intra-dependence of embodied experience. For example, the extract below captures a sense of the intra-connectedness of the avatar-gamer's embodied experience. Empathy emerges at the most instinctive of "human" acts: holding your breath underwater.

> *I'm completing a quest underwater, diving for relics in a deep, wide lake. I'm absorbed in my task, deep beneath the water where the colours and sounds are dulled and I am lulled into that ethereal state of being. Etyme's air supply seems ample – until suddenly it doesn't and I am forced to ascend. I begin to worry when I don't break the surface – I hadn't realised I was so deep. I need to get Etyme to the surface and I find myself holding my own breath, a worried look adorning my face as I watch the air supply dwindle and watch her body rise… I make it, and breathe again.*

In this extract, the avatar was experienced through a visceral reaction through my body. We could make sense of this embodied empathy in two ways. One way we can analyse this form of empathy would be through Blackman's (2012: 82) description of affect as nonconscious mimicry or 'attunement', which is 'not about conscious recognition but about forms of bodily affectivity'[41]. When one human smiles at another, the "instinct" is to smile back; likewise, in gameplay Etyme's experience of being underwater is enacted through mimicry on the body of the gameplayer. The avatar-gamer enmeshment creates the space to react in ways that are not only imitation, but happen

[40] I would like to thank the reviewers of the journal article 'Empathy at Play: Posthuman subjectivities in gaming' co-authored by Dr. Adrienne Evans and I for their helpful comments here.
[41] This is supported by the definition Ash and Gallacher (2015: 70) propose, that '[a]ttunement can be understood as a basic way of sensing the world before we organise it through internal self-narration'.

beyond conscious recognition. More than this, my experience is one of being underwater – *I'm absorbed in my task, deep beneath the water* – while re-emerging similarly provokes a shared avatar-gamer reaction – *I make it, and breathe again.*

Similar experiences occur elsewhere in relation to my concern over the avatar body in ways that demonstrate the swift switch between subjective and objective analysis. I recognise the incorporation of "self" and "other" in my own fieldnotes, and attempt to make sense of the visceral responses that occur in game:

> *When gaming I ran into a fire and therefore got set on fire which transmits damage. In a panic I ran into the water. What weird application of logic is this?! I can't tell who is at fault, me or the game. The game decides the logic that if you walk into a fire you get set on fire and if you get set on fire it hurts. It doesn't recognise the logic of water+fire though, and instead the pain is programmed to last a certain period – a matter of seconds as shown in the top right of the screen. I wrote pain. What I mean is damage. No one is in pain. I must keep telling myself that.* (Wilde 2015: 142)

These feelings of being "freaked out" and "panicking" show my loss of (perceived) control over the situation and the concern that I felt towards the damage that was being inflicted. The first sentence describes the events in objective unconcerned tones, but the feeling was truly of confusion, concern, and – as the fire continued – panic. The language reflects this in the switch to the description of "suffering" (echoed in the following sentences with "hurt" and "pain"). This is not objective but subjective and whilst I felt no pain the panic was a visceral feeling. This moment signifies the intra-action between the avatar, the gameworld and myself. As I panic, viscerally, for the well-being of my avatar I apply "Real Life" logic to this virtual world and try to save myself, or her(?) through submerging my/her body in water. When this doesn't work I am frustrated and confused (Wilde 2015: 142).

Farrow and Iacovides (2012: 4) assert that 'we never experience the physical pain of a wounded avatar; only a representation of it'. However, I contest the idea that

we do not experience the avatar subjectively[42]. Although we necessarily experience the avatar *differently* to our own physical body; the above is one such example of the involuntary physical and visceral reaction to the experience of the avatar (Wilde 2015: 143).

We could also draw some interesting conclusions regarding the perceived "reality" of the situation in the above fieldnote. It is as if the visceral nature of the panic has accentuated a belief in the danger, which is presented by the fire. This example shows the extent to which gaming experience becomes both a cognitive and bodily activity of immersion in the game (Wilde 2015: 142-143). The fieldnote also provides an interesting twist with regards to the post-digital treatment of "real" vs. "virtual", which acknowledges that 'digital technology is deeply embedded in "everyday life". It serves to emphasize that "the digital" is not as definite as we might assume: that it is no "virtual reality" distinct from our everyday world, but a constitutive part of it' (Kwastek 2015: 79). Accordingly, the game experiences are not felt as a "virtual" (and therefore "unreal") domain, but elicit reactions that would fit with our "everyday world". In the affective reality of this moment there is an instinctual desire to apply ingrained, logical, "real life" solutions of water to douse the flames. Rather than the detached unemotional engagement online that sceptics such as Turkle (2011) might assume, instead what is indicated with the avatar here is an ethics of care that extended beyond the physical "self" and into an online environment. Whilst Turkle's (2011: 6) concern is that in caring for a technological other we are somehow diminished, I side with Pepperell's (2003: 172) claim that 'the recognition that none of us are actually distinct from each other, or the world, will profoundly affect the way we treat each other, different species and the environment. To harm anything is to harm oneself'. Accordingly, empathy and care for an avatar could be considered as a step towards a broader empathy and care for all "others" beyond the "self". This could be aligned with Braidotti's (2013: 49-50) posthuman ethics that emphasises an 'enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others, by removing the obstacle of self-

[42] It is also potentially problematic to suggest that the ways in which we experience the pain of our own physical bodies is in isolation from external perceptions. Researchers at Harvard University have found that our experience of pain can depend on whether or not we think it is being caused intentionally, with participants rating their pain scales higher when they believe it was deliberately inflicted (Gray and Wegner 2008).

centred individualism' (I return to notions of posthuman ethics in more depth in the following chapter).

A second way we could explain the complex forms of empathy at play when the avatar-gamer extend into one another is Coplan's (2011) 'affective matching', which she lists as an essential feature of empathy. In Coplan's (2011: 7) definition, 'this matching must come about in a particular way, namely through other-oriented perspective-taking'. In her view, this perspective taking is more than nonconscious mimicry, so that emotional contagion alone does not constitute empathy (Wilde and Evans 2017: 9). Instead, 'affective matching occurs only if an observer's affective states are qualitatively identical to a target's, though they may vary in degree. The observer must therefore experience the same type of emotion (or affect) as the target' (Coplan 2011: 6). She continues:

> [o]ne of the key differences between emotional contagion and empathy is that contagion is a direct, automatic, unmediated process. Empathy is never fully unmediated since it requires perspective-taking. Roughly, perspective-taking is an imaginative process through which one constructs another person's subjective experience by simulating the experience of being in the other's situation. (Coplan 2011: 9)

Gameplay empathy, by its nature, is never unmediated. And although the fieldnotes certainly demonstrate instances of emotional contagion, such that there is automatic imitation of one another in the avatar-gamer relationship, I argue that the extracts above demonstrate more than this. One might argue that holding one's breath (in the fieldnote underwater) or trying to put out a fire (in the extract above) is instinctive; however, in those instances there was also concern and panic. In the empathetic blurring of embodied, affective and cognitive, such fieldnotes demonstrate a reaction to the situation, including recognition of what the consequence of the immediate danger is: for instance, drowning or burning. I expand on how this perspective-taking is facilitated through the game below. In this extract, empathy emerges directly through the

mechanics of the game, which produces an embodied reaction in the avatar that directly affects the gamer.

> *I am "disorientated" – this is both a spell that hits me and an actual feeling! The disorientation spell forces the person hit with it to run off in the wrong direction, changing suddenly at a tangent, and then again, and again. It is a brilliant "spell" for the fact that it is subjectively experienced exactly as intended – it is completely disorientating and I'm totally thrown by it, having no idea where I have ended up when the spell is over.* (Wilde and Evans 2017: 9)

As I have discussed above, empathy is more than the impulse to repeat affect, but is a deeply felt perspective-taking that produces affective reactions and extends the feeling of self. In the above, this shared perspective between Etyme and myself is enhanced by a sudden change during gameplay.

The "disorientation spell" creates a seamless experience between avatar and gamer, whereby one, the avatar, physically reacts to it (moving around the gamespace), and the other, the gamer, feels it. The account given refutes any boundary between human and non-human and the lines between the physical reaction and the feeling of disorientation merge, shaping the holistic experience of the disorientation spell. We could take this analysis even further: while we cannot ever know what Etyme *feels*, this is true of all other human and non-human objects (Wilde and Evans 2017: 9). At the very least, the intra-action between avatar and gamer demonstrates a distributed empathy, whereby the body has the capacity to affect and to be affected, so that both have a vibrancy that deems the relationship between the two horizontal, non-hierarchical and heterogeneous (Bennett 2010).

Reading the concept of empathy through Coplan's (2011) notion of 'affective matching' and Blackman's (2012) nonconscious mimicry, I would argue that the embodiment of gameplay represented by the extracts above is a *post*-biological one: 'both organic and inorganic, living and non-living, material and immaterial' (Blackman 2012: 13-14). This takes gameplay beyond the view of the avatar as a tool, as we begin to see how intertwined the avatar-gamer subjectivity is in cognitively embodied ways.

Empathetic connections in pride, skill and achievement

> *I realise I feel really proud of these achievements, like me and Etyme have become a more formidable team, working together and eliminating our foes.*

The empathetic relationship therefore goes beyond moments of shock or bodily affect, but also occurs through a cognitive matching. In the note above, distributed cognition experienced by the gamer becomes clear (e.g. "me and Etyme") and the empathetic lines less so. Is the player experiencing empathy for the avatar's achievement, or vice versa? Just as Boulter (2015: 65) asks 'who is playing? Who is *being* played?', we could ask "who is achieving? Who is being achieved?". The sense of achievement is distributed, and the source of either achievement or rightful "ownership" of the achievement is unclear, becoming in "human" terms an example of "good teamwork" (see Chapter 7: Emergent Subject Positions for further exploration of achievement and "good" behaviours as humanist constructs that need destabilising in a posthuman account).

Therefore, in addition to empathy facilitating the experience of an extended body, the narrative of the game also elicits emotional responses that engender imaginative empathy, especially in the shared experiences of the avatar-gamer as the two co-develop. Although "imaginative" might suggest these empathetic connections are fictional, I would argue that a posthuman empathy would not require a distinction between the "real" and the "imagined"[43]. The broad field of posthumanism has already identified the problems that occur from creating or enforcing binary positions such as machine/human, real/virtual, man/woman to name but a few (see for example Braidotti 2013; Halberstam and Livingstone 1995; Boulter 2015), and to consider gaming as an experience outside of "real life" ignores it as a situated, embodied practice. In gaming,

[43] See Ferreday (2009; 2012) for further discussion of the complex links between "real" and "imaginative".

the emotional reactions that empathy provokes are experientially real, although admittedly with less longevity or consequence[44].

As with my analysis above of shared embodiment, this imaginative empathy between avatar-gamer can at first occur as affective embodied reactions to events in ways that demonstrate the interconnections between mind, body and cognition. The extract below retells a moment where Etyme and myself experienced something unexpected, which provokes a desire for retribution.

> *I round a corner at one point, climbing a tower, and suddenly encounter a mob which, for one reason or another, I wasn't expecting. "Whoa, fuck!" I involuntarily gasp, my heart lurches and I quickly scramble to regain equilibrium and kill off the offending mob. It is unlikely that it would actually succeed in killing me but there is a particular kind of vengeance I feel towards it for having taken me by surprise and I dispatch it quickly – in my mind brutally. It panicked me, disrupting my equilibrium and shaking me from my perceived skill and feeling of prowess. I take a moment, and vow to be more diligent as I scrutinise the remaining enemies below. I drop down on them from above, and unleash my anger in efficient blows.* (Wilde and Evans 2017: 11)

In the above, a seamless and nonconscious reaction to the game produces a visceral affective response – "Whoa, fuck!". In addition, however, there is also an imaginative, emotional engagement with the game, which cannot be reduced to the body alone. Instead cognitive and affective experiences expand our embodied awareness through their different operations (Braidotti 2013; Hayles 1999). Here, for example, the avatar-gamer reaction to this moment of gameplay produces an emotive reaction, retold in the fieldnotes as vengeance, pride and anger. The perception of anger being unleashed in "efficient blows" seems to indicate a projected empathy from the part of the avatar, responding to the anger of the player and externalising it through action. Part of these

[44] Additionally, in the traditional sciences, empathy itself has been shown to make use of the same neuronal pathways, regardless of whether the events are 'fictional' or 'real life' (Kemp 2012: xviii), so that the biological body empathetically reacts in chemically similar ways to characters in books and films as it would to another material body.

emotions are facilitated by the affordances of MMORPGs, which enable both player vs. environment and player vs. player gameplay, meaning that the experiences of the game are in some way mediated by the existence of other avatar or avatar-gamer bodies. The further categorisation of these "others" as either Alliance or Horde creates a social context through which various power relations are shaped (Chen 2009; Williams et al. 2006). The recognition of the avatar-gamer self, expressed above as being skilled, having "prowess" and an ability to land "efficient blows", means that, like all forms of subjectivity, self-awareness is formed through recognition (and misrecognition) of the self as separate to others (both human and non-human), thereby imagining these others to also have self-awareness.

Emotions during gameplay are therefore not asocial or individual, but are constituted through the intra-action with "objects" in the game. For me, the emotional entanglement of avatar-gamer has been most evident in fieldnotes collected during player vs. player scenarios and battlegrounds. These battlegrounds are events that occur outside the "normal" gameplay, and players have to join a queue to wait their turn to enter them. When ready, you are transported from your position within *World of Warcraft* to a battleground location that is a specific environment for Alliance and Horde factions to meet and combat one another in teams. These battlegrounds facilitate empathetic relations to emerge between avatar-gamer and other avatar-gamers, and encourages the feeling that gameplay has a real, meaningful impact on the environment.

> *I enjoy the sense of achievement which I get in battlegrounds, as it makes your proficiency public. It's basically an opportunity to show off, highlighting how much of a performance it is as it serves as an opportunity to display to others how skilful you are, how good you look. You are rewarded by conquering your foes and collecting on the achievement points, ultimately winning the battle. At the end of each battleground the achievements for each player are displayed, further accentuating this public moment of glory – or failure.*

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> *There is such a level of pent up excitement on these battlegrounds, and even when you spend much of your time dead (as I do) this is made more obvious through the forced procedure of waiting the allotted amount of time before you can resurrect and get back to the fight. At one point I engage in one-on-one combat with another hunter: we both circle each other slowly, our awareness of the space reduced to that which flows between us and ignoring all of the other players who flow around us. Our ranged attack on each other is interrupted by the end of the battleground.*

Above, I recount the affective feelings of pride, excitement, glory and impatience in gameplay, which are again coupled with affective embodied reactions such the temporal feeling of time passing when waiting to "resurrect", or in losing spatial awareness and getting lost in the moment. Unlike earlier extracts from the fieldnotes, the narrative retelling often appears without "Etyme", with both avatar and gamer becoming "I" and the events within gameplay affecting this "I". This has already been noted in the previous chapter in relation to the phenomenon of "pronoun play" (see, for example, Hand 2005; Burn and Schott 2014). Moreover, the former extract also demonstrates the potential emotional payoffs within social interaction, as well as through the publishing of the "results". As Ash (2012a: 18) has stated, the display of user points amplifies the potential for affect 'beyond the original event in which the achievement was gained'. These feelings of achievement are further facilitated through the story that sets Alliance and Horde in opposition to each other, so that your own "work" belongs to a wider plot.

Narrative engagement

Although the elements of cognitive matching that are discussed in the above section demonstrate an engagement with the overarching storyline it is nevertheless worth considering how this matching varies. It would appear common sense to assume that part of what facilitates an empathic experience and cognitive matching between avatar and gamer would be engagement with the narrative, as the interactive medium of games require that any story or situation given to the avatar must be enacted by the gamer (assuming they are playing according to the rules – Mortensen (2011) has written about

deviant strategies that demonstrate some subversive styles of play that challenge such conformity). As previously discussed (see Chapter 5 Acting to Intra-acting) this means that agency is enacted through the entangled entities – the gamer's capacity to act is channelled through the avatar and for the avatar to progress with the in-game quests the gamer must allow the avatar's motivations to be projected onto themselves. However, this is not necessarily through an emotional engagement with the *World of Warcraft storyline*.

Whilst in the previous chapter I shared some fieldnotes that demonstrated my own desire to understand the narrative in the game, I have also been surprised by how easily the "formal" narrative structure of the game can be neglected. For example, when given a quest by an NPC (non-playing character) in *World of Warcraft* the gamer is presented with a pop-up box of the NPC's speech about that quest. The brief includes a summary of the details of the task (e.g. 'NPC wants you to kill 10 spiders') and under that are the buttons to accept or decline. In dungeons, which usually involve five gamers working together towards a specific goal, it becomes immediately apparent that gamers are accepting the quests as quickly as possible in order to get on and complete them; no one is actually stopping to *read* the whys and wherefores or getting involved in the narrative:

> *playing dungeons is a completely different experience. There is no time to actually read the instructions or get to grips with the story that you're actually trying to follow or complete with being in the dungeon. Because I have recently realised that this is precisely what imbues a level of "immersion" in my own gaming experience this is quite disruptive because if I don't listen to what the NPCs are saying and don't read their text I miss out on the story aspect but if I do I get left behind. So there is no time to read and figure out what it is that you are actually supposed to be doing and you simply accept objectives without necessarily reading them. I end up leaving a dungeon because the party has invited me to join another but I haven't yet completed the first quests.*

Whilst this fieldnote demonstrates my own interest in narrative it also demonstrates the highly subjective experience of gaming and the difference in potential playing styles that gamers can move between[45]. Engagement with narrative can be a highly "immersive" activity in some forms of gaming, however, I would suggest that – for some gamers – it is more of an optional quality and their focus is on progression and achievement rather than story[46]. However, this isn't to say that empathy with an avatar isn't being experienced, only that what drives people's engagement in the game is highly variable – the examples in the above section demonstrating pride and skill are affective and empathic, but do not relate to specific mini-narratives within the game.

In my own gameplay I have felt most engaged with the *overarching* competitive narrative, either through the battlegrounds or through a feeling of pride in my achievements as discussed in the above section. Elsewhere, optional involvement when various locations in world have been "under attack" from players of the opposite faction have provided motivation to engage with the fight.

In game you are alerted when a location nearby is under attack by the statement appearing in the chat box on the "Local Defence Channel" whenever a member of the opposing faction enters a territory that is not theirs and begins attacking the NPCs there (Wilde 2015: 144).

> *I receive notification that a territory near me is under attack and quickly make the decision to go to its defence. After flying furiously and silently urging my mount on faster (an action which is only perceptible by my finger pressing the "forwards" key harder on the keyboard) when I finally arrive at the place I am suddenly cautious and somewhat tentative. I notice the invading players ahead. Instead of the number indicating their level, a small skull with glowing red eyes appears in its place, which strengthens the feeling of foreboding within me. Unsurprisingly, I'm killed almost instantly. When I resurrect I swiftly summon*

[45] As seen in Chapter 3, Bartle (1996) has most famously written about different player types, however it is important to note that the way in which a player engages with a game need not necessarily be stable or fixed, and they may play different games in entirely different ways.

[46] It may be that this is more prevalent in MMORPGs due to the open world structure – where single player games usually follow one narrative, the possibilities for exploration are wider in MMORPGs, which can lead to non-linear storylines (Wilde 2015: 144).

> *my flying mount and launch myself into the air away from the enemy players. Initially I expect pursuit but when it isn't immediately forthcoming I edge closer – though still a safe distance away. The enemy players are standing in a loose circle and I can only presume are in deep discussion. I am ignored, or unseen, and eventually skulk off, a little abashed for having attempted something obviously beyond my ability. There has been a depth of feeling in this quest which has been absent from the PvE (player versus environment) quests from NPCs and I wonder at the way in which the human involvement has changed that. I wonder also whether it is to do with the difficulty level, and the potential to fail. Most of the PvE quests are easily achievable; it is not hard to outwit the machine. This in turn means that the achievement itself feels hollow. There needs to be some sense of a challenge in order to make the quest resonate as a REAL quest, a REAL victory. Other RL players provide this touchstone with reality which seems to facilitate a deeper sense of affect. I think it links back to the notion of there being a sense of consequence.* (Wilde 2015: 144-145)

This fieldnote demonstrates another moment of reflexive engagement with the game experience, questioning the affects that move between determination, hesitance, and humiliation. Although this fieldnote might be criticised for implying a preference to playing with "humans" rather than outwitting the "machine" and thereby imposing a dichotomy that this thesis aims to avoid, it is actually the level of difficulty that I note as being of the utmost importance for facilitating a sense of "real" achievement. Farrow and Iacovides (2012: 9) suggest that '[a] more immersive or convincing sense of embodiment within digital worlds may also depend on experiencing a convincing, meaningful world within which the player has a sense of choice and responsibility'[47].

Whitlock (2004: 124) presents another view; that the "reality" of playing with others facilitates adrenaline: '[c]hallenging and outwitting another human as opposed to the artificial intelligence of the computer increased the sense of 'winning' adding to player satisfaction'. Whilst this view seems to implicitly impose a real/virtual binary

[47] Interestingly these definitions can again bring us back to theatre by way of Aristotle's *Poetics*, where he states that imitated actions should be 'an action which has serious implications, is complete, and possesses magnitude' (2004 [c. 335 BCE]: 99).

that I want to avoid, I would suggest that the empathetic connection between avatar-gamers are so intertwined as to create another form of empathy, where the avatar-gamer joins into the phenomena of other avatar-gamers. The empathy that is being experienced between my avatar-gamer entanglement is implicated in another's avatar-gamer entanglement, so that each of these intra-actions are made more affective through their intra-action with one another. This creates a sense of an intensified empathy as it is experienced as more meaningful through the incorporation of more entities. I would therefore suggest that in this intra-action there is a continuous affective flow, where the avatar-gamer are not only one posthuman subjectivity, but are actively affective and affecting other objects (including other avatar-gamers) in their environment, creating a vast network of posthuman subjectivities (Wilde and Evans 2017: 12).

Human-non-human

So far I have argued gameplay empathy creates a range of posthuman subjectivities by shaping cognitive and affective extensions of the avatar-gamer entanglement; emotional perspective-taking with other players; and the engagement with the story and world provided by the game. The avatar-gamer subject is integral: they feel together through the body, while the existence of other feeling avatar-gamers means that this posthuman embodiment is shared, distributed and connected, creating the space for emotions such as pride, skill and achievement, within a particular context that, whether gamers engage with it fully or not, nevertheless provides motivation for the action to take place. I would suggest this is both a conscious and nonconscious extension in a human-machine world that has co-evolved (Hayles 2006), so that the two "objects" – avatar and gamer – become inseparable subjects. In my fieldnotes, this is provoked when empathy connects one subject to another through the very human fear of death:

> *Etyme falls from a great height and I gasp. It is completely involuntary, I am in that moment, her, falling, perhaps to her/my death. It is a ridiculous concept because even if Etyme were to die I would be fine, and it would take just moments to run my spirit through the graveyard to find her body and resurrect. Note the my/her complications. The boundaries are blurred. She is not me but*

> *she is not not-me. Just as Daboo (2007: 264 and 271) notes as actors create characters who they 'both are-and-are-not [...] It is both me-and-not-me at the same time'.* (Wilde 2015: 143)

Although "I" as gamer am in no danger, the perceived threat against the avatar is felt empathetically through the holding of a breath, a gasp, a "lurch" in the heart. Such instances demonstrate the blurring of boundaries that occurs in gaming, where avatar-gamer are experienced as enmeshed, because they put into practice the fundamental fear of impermanence. Such experiences allow for a body-subject that operates with and through technical entities and enables a flow of bodily being, whereby:

> [t]he term 'body' is usually replaced by the concept of body-subject […] which displaces a mind-body dualism but does not reduce bodies to material (physiological, neurological, biological) processes. The incorporations enacted by a body-subject include technical, material extensions which articulate the body in new ways. (Blackman 2012: 9)

I would take Blackman's (2012) suggestion of the body-subject further, and would argue that empathy allows for a state that is neither wholly about distributed embodiments nor distributed emotions, but a concept that allows for the dynamic intra-action between the two: an 'ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting components' (Barad 2007: 33). In my own self-reflections on gameplay, this dynamic also means that to be *both me-and-not-me* involves something more than becoming Etyme, demonstrating that posthuman subjectivity is not only about living in the body of the machine. Etyme herself is a necessary part of this emergent empathy. At times, Etyme dying can be experienced as the player dying (or provoking the fear of death); at other times, gameplay can feel like a negotiation (or even struggle) between two separate-but-connected subjects. By refusing the boundary between human and non-human and rethinking this relationship as one which is constantly in flux, we can conceptualise the avatar differently, capable of an affective exchange with the gamer, and creating resonance between avatar and gamer (Wilde and Evans 2017: 13).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have suggested that we could consider empathy to be a posthuman concept that disrupts the idea of the human as a bounded and fixed self and instead emphasises relationality, intersubjectivity and permeability. In gaming this is made apparent through the affective and cognitive involvement of avatar and gamer, and these affective flows which transcend the boundaries between human and non-human. This allows for a space where specific posthuman subjectivities are formed from intra-acting components. These subjectivities are emergent and require an equality of bodies, both virtual and physical. This is a posthumanism which acknowledges the importance of embodiment and affect along Braidotti's (2013: 90-91) lines: '[a] posthuman notion of the enfleshed and extended, relational self', which 'allows us to respect the bond of mutual dependence between bodies and technological others'. The avatar-gamer as posthuman subjectivity is an empathically connected construction of avatar and gamer through both perspective-taking and embodiment, and demonstrates an intimacy between material and immaterial.

If we read empathy as a posthuman affect, which follows Braidotti's (2013: 26) values that 'object to the unitary subject of Humanism, including its socialist variables, and to replace it with a more complex and relational subject framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire as core qualities', our concept of subjectivity becomes one that resists the idea of the human as a fixed and bounded entity by demonstrating the ways in which human beings are enmeshed through their ability to affect and be affected by circumstances, environments, and feelings beyond what is housed in the "boundary" of their skin. The posthuman model understands that 'human functionality expands because the parameters of the cognitive system it inhabits expand' (Hayles 1999: 290-291) and that rather than *transcending* the body we instead *extend* our embodied awareness. This way of thinking of our way of being could also allow us to consider what Blackman (2012: xxiii) terms 'the problem of being "one yet many" […] how we can be "more than one and less than many", or how we can "hang together" in light of the multiple possibilities of becoming that exist'. Blackman (2012: xxiii) goes on to explore '[t]he paradoxes and puzzles that this creates in offering a relational and processual account of corporeality and subjectivity' and this thesis

follows her lead, considering gaming as one way in which we can examine relational and processual subjectivity. We could therefore suggest that empathy is an affect that facilitates Hayles' expansion of awareness, or Blackman's 'relational subjectivity', which could be considered as 'psychological attunement' (Blackman 2012: xxv).

For the gamer, the "posthumanising" of empathy is made more apparent precisely through the fact that the body that one is empathising with and the environment in which it navigates its experience is a digital construction, a virtual world. This does not, however, serve to disrupt the affective flow – as demonstrated by the fieldnotes discussed above, the digital experience of gaming is very much felt to be one which does not bifurcate the experience as "real" vs. "virtual": Broadhurst (2012: 9) puts it, '[r]ather, than being separate from the body, technology becomes part of the body and alters and recreates our experience in the world'. In this way there is a sense of empathic connection as the objectives of avatar and gamer emerge through their specific intra-action in the gameworld.

My concept of a posthuman empathy is therefore decentralised: it is not "owned" by either gamer or avatar or game. I have explored how the empathetic relationship between avatar-gamer actively problematises any clear distinctions between human and machine. I have deployed the use of empathy in a more fluid understanding of the experience, expanding the concept of empathy to include an acknowledgement of the empathetic capacity of non-human elements in an entanglement and a rhizomatic understanding of the different agencies at play. My "posthuman empathy" blends the principles of posthumanism (e.g. in a post-anthropocentric acknowledgement of the permeability of beings) with the principles of empathy (e.g. a dynamic interaction of cognitive and affective responses) (Wilde and Evans 2017: 13).

In my analysis, the relationship between Etyme and I is one of care, concern and connection, despite the avatar's digital form. Such avatar-gamer relationships are testament to the deep connections between human and machine. My empathetic relationship with the avatar is indicative of the very real experience of connecting with non-human others, in ways that do not fight for dominance of human over machine but accept the equality of both avatar and gamer: a principle central to posthuman ethics

(e.g. Braidotti 2013; Bennett 2010). What emerges is 'a more relational ontology that explores how entities emerge from intra-actions consisting of human and non-human agencies' (Blackman 2012: 174).

The shifting flows between self and other are complex yet easily apparent in the fieldnotes – for example in the switches between "I", "we" and "Etyme". The relationship is a constant negotiation between the avatar and gamer, as the desires of one cannot be achieved without the actions of another, so that each part must be receptive to the goals of the other. This empathy is further facilitated by the game mechanics which constantly seek to bring the avatar and gamer together and allow a spectrum of feelings to proliferate, demonstrated above through feelings from disorientation to pride[48]. Connecting with the avatar demands an emotional and embodied attachment in order to succeed at the game, and using empathy I have been able to acknowledge these particular moments in order to demonstrate the intra-dependence at the centre of avatar-gamer relationships (Wilde and Evans 2017: 14).

Empathy has therefore been used as one analytic for how posthuman subjectivity has arisen from the avatar-gamer in *World of Warcraft*. I have demonstrated how empathy helps to conceptualise the connection between a human and non-human "other", in a way that shares perspectives and bodies along channels of affective feeling. The experience is one that is undeniably fuses human and machine, retaining emotional and embodied feelings in a permeable way.

Having moved from acting as a specific, performative practice, to empathy as a broader emergent capacity experienced through different intra-actions, in the following chapter I take this work further to consider not only specific practices that could be posthumanised, but how we can posthumanise the very emergence of subjectivity in itself.

[48] See Ash (2013) for a discussion of the ways in which certain games are designed to create captivated subjects.

Chapter 7: Emergent Subject Positions

'The human being is not the eternal basis of human history and human culture but a historical and cultural artefact.' (Rose 1998: 22)

Introduction

The first theme of this thesis (Chapter 5: From Acting to Intra-acting) looked at the practice of acting, and complicated this through posthumanism. Drawing on my own knowledge of acting theory from a background in performance and my work as an actor, I used Stanislavskian and Chekhovian acting techniques and considered how these were apparent in the intra-action of avatar and gamer. By re-reading these themes using posthuman theory I was able to trouble notions of self-mastery and control that some acting practices promote, and showed how some of the more "textual" elements of the game (including aspects of character choice, backstory, and appearance) could be "posthumanised".

From there I moved to more affective aspects of MMORPG gaming, considering moments of high intensity (Chapter 6: Enacting Empathy). Reading these as empathic experiences, I then explored the ways in which "dangerous" embodied encounters evoked a visceral response; how I could broaden aspects of narrative engagement from a performative perspective into an empathic one; and how feelings of pride and skill were linked to the game. Critically analysing the notion of empathy and troubling the notions of "self" and "other" differentiation, I proposed a "posthuman empathy".

Having moved from the more "textual" engagements with the game to a focus on the affective experience, the following chapter looks at another sphere of posthuman subjectivity, broadening those ideas still further to review how our "sense of self" is constituted. In this chapter I consider how subject forming notions are experienced by posthuman subjectivities by extending humanist notions uncovered in the previous chapter, such as aspects of "achievement" and how this lends itself to a sense of progression and betterment. To do so I borrow from various understandings of how the human subject is formed, which at times lean into a more psychological perspective. However, as with Rose (1998: 2) before me, it is important to note that I 'do not claim

to provide even the sketch for a history of psychology' as summarising such a long history would not be doable in a single chapter, and would not advance the specific argument of this thesis. Instead, I explore how certain aspects of how we understand ourselves are historically contingent and therefore need "posthumanising".

Psychology has been tied up with how we understand ourselves in the 20th century – it is central to humanist conceptions of self (Polkinghorne 1991). Traditionally, as Blackman (2012: 185) explains, the notion of the autonomous self allowed an exploration of the 'normative image of personhood that became embedded and produced within psychology'. This autonomous self is an inherent aspect of the liberal human subject. Humanism only makes sense if we understand ourselves in certain ways suggested by psychology – as motivated, attentive, progressive creatures. Whilst Sey (1999) makes some initial links towards a posthuman psychology in *Cyberpsychology*, these were based on an imposition of a technological order on the psychological subject. He suggests two potential outcomes of cyberpsychology in a posthuman culture (Sey 1999: 38-39). Firstly, that a subject "liberated" from the constraints of the body through cyberspace would allow for a metaphysical anthropology, and accordingly there would be more scope for freedom of expression and identity construction (Sey 1999: 38-39). Conversely, the alternative outcome would be a 'lament for the passing of the human which the information era might imply' (Sey 1999: 39). In either scenario, Sey's (1999) posthuman is more in line with a tele- and technologically deterministic version. It therefore approaches posthuman psychology in a somewhat machinic manner, rather than from the position of destabilising the liberal human subject. In this chapter I instead propose that in order to consider posthuman subjectivity we need to return to psychological humanist perspectives and rethink them.

This chapter's purpose is twofold. On the one hand it demonstrates how certain humanist notions of subject formation are prevalent even within the posthuman context of the avatar-gamer subjectivity, thus demonstrating humanism's strong grip on our understandings of "self". On the other hand, it critically engages with these notions of motivation, attention, progression and what our histories mean to us. I complicate these taken-for-granted ideals, and show how certain emotions and affects (boredom, nostalgia, frustration) have been neglected in the conception of self proposed by the liberal human subject. Focussing on these more "negative" feelings sheds light on the

intrinsic problems of living the "good life", and demonstrates other aspects of our already-posthumanity.

Subjectivity

As I explained in Chapter 3: Embracing a Contradictory Methodology, I am still using the notion of subjectivity, despite some questions as to whether this is a radical enough use of posthumanism (see, for one discussion, Callus and Herbrechter 2012: 249). I laid out my argument for the use of the "I" – as Herbrechter (2012: 332) states: 'anything human (including the post-, trans- or inhuman) is […] unthinkable without a notion of subjectivity'. From this perspective, and in my own view, the subject therefore remains integral to the paradigms in which we operate (Callus and Herbrechter 2012: 259).

Nevertheless, as this thesis has demonstrated thus far, notions and protocols of the liberal human subject and subjectivity itself are 'critiqued or at least critically extend[ed], implicitly but also quite explicitly in places' (to borrow from Callus and Herbrechter 2012: 255) in posthumanism. But what are some of the overarching aspects of subjectivity that shape our understanding of self? Hayles (1999: 3) provides an insight as to the disruption of humanism through posthuman subjectivity:

> [t]o elucidate the significant shift in underlying assumptions about subjectivity signaled by the posthuman, we can recall one of the definitive texts characterizing the liberal humanist subject: C. B. Macpherson's analysis of possessive individualism. "Its possessive quality is found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, *owing nothing to society for them*. ... The human essence is *freedom from the wills of others*, and freedom is a function of possession." The italicized phrases mark convenient points of departure for measuring the distance between the human and the posthuman.

The notions of free will and individuality are ones that I will explore in the following chapter through aspects of motivation, attention, and progression, as I try to make sense

of certain experiences that demonstrate the very entangled practices that we engage in and how open to influence we are. However, more than that I argue that there are certain affects and feelings that have also been written out of the conception of subjectivity to instead emphasise what it is to be a good, liberal human subject. It is my suggestion that *posthuman* subjectivity should therefore necessarily focus on these neglected experiences and emotions in order to destabilise our taken-for-granted ideals more comprehensively.

Individualism

As Danziger (1997: 39) has explained, '[m]any of the fundamental categories of twentieth-century psychology are, to all intents and purposes, twentieth-century inventions', and we should therefore be critical of the ways in which we understand ourselves, our subject formations, and what affects we pay attention to. Danziger (1997: 40) continues by explaining that modern psychology was associated with a 'revolutionary restructuring of the network of categories employed in the conceptualization of human experience and conduct'. Accordingly, the notions of "human nature" should be understood as culturally and historically contingent – as we have seen in Chapter 2: Proposing the Posthuman Gamer the human subject as a "rational" being privileged those in power – the educated, white, male (see also Danziger 1997: 40; Rose 1998: 9). Danziger (1997) explores the shift from passion to emotion, and the rise of "reason" and "action" as individually negotiated (this focus on rationalism is often linked to the Age of Enlightenment, see, for example, Gergen 1991). Whereas the "pre-modern" individual experienced themselves as being a part of the world and a higher order, this began to shift as humans saw themselves as distanced from their surroundings and environments. According to Danziger (1997: 49), this meant:

> a new conception of the self could become established. The self now became the subjectively localized point of origin from which each individual experienced

> and acted on a world that had become no more than a source of those experiences and of the raw material for the individual's actions[49].

We can immediately draw some interesting conclusions from Danziger's analysis. Firstly, posthumanism critiques the liberal human subject that this shift in psychological thinking bears strong links to. At this point it is worth considering how posthumanism critiques notions of the "self" in a way that differs from post-structuralist anti-humanism. According to Callus and Herbrechter (2012: 254), whilst post-structuralism has 'approached the question of "subjectivity by design" only theoretically […] [i]t is posthumanism that is singular in pushing that question in the light of the praxis – not least theory's own – that follows upon the question not being, any longer, merely hypothetical or speculative'[50]. Posthumanism therefore aims to interfere more radically in our conception of what it is to be a self or a subject than post-structuralism, by proposing different ways of being through more distributed and post-anthropocentric understandings of self. As Pepperell (2003: 172) suggests, posthumanism's recognition that we are all entangled rather than distinct 'will profoundly affect the way we treat each other, different species and the environment. To harm anything is to harm oneself'.

Furthermore, where post-structuralist anti-humanism has been be considered a less hopeful paradigm (see, for example, contributions to Ramazanoglu 1993), posthumanism offers a more 'affirmative' framework, as Braidotti (2013) posits. As Pepperell (2013: 171) suggests, 'posthumanism is about how we live, how we conduct our exploitation of the environment, animals and each other'. Likewise, my own work aims to go beyond 'rhetoric' and instead considers the ways in which we can make new conceptions of subjectivity *matter* (see also Braidotti 2013: 37). As the previous two chapters have shown, we can conduct ourselves in ways that embrace our distribution rather than battle it for a sense of mastery. In the following chapter, I therefore draw on post-structuralist thinkers such as Danzinger and Rose, but shift their critiques beyond post-structuralist analysis and into the posthuman domain by moving towards a more

[49] A similar argument is made by Blackman (2012: 33) regarding the way in which crowd mentality and mental touch were written out of mainstream psychology, and were seen as 'an exceptional, abnormal phenomenon' that threatened 'the boundaries of the atomized individual'.
[50] Although many of the creative approaches to writing that post-structuralists use could also be considered a form of praxis.

practical consideration. More than just "being" posthuman, I consider how are we "doing" posthumanism through our approaches to acting, or empathy, or, as this chapter will show, through boredom, frustration, or nostalgia. Reconceptualising 'the values of liberal humanism, a coherent, rational self, the right of that self to autonomy and freedom, and a sense of agency linked with a belief in enlightened self-interest' (Hayles 1999: 85-86) is of utmost importance when exploring the posthuman condition, and these values will be some of the initial facets of subjectivity I will explore below.

Danziger's (1997) analysis demonstrates the humanist conception of "self" as separate from surrounding as an historical shift – moving from pre-modern relationality to modern separation. As Braidotti (2013: 29) explains, liberal humanism has supported 'individualism, autonomy, responsibility and self-determination' and these notions have therefore become deeply ingrained within our discourse and practices. It is therefore essential to explore how entrenched our perceptions of these "traits" are, to the extent that they are apparent even in our entangled, posthuman practices, in order to consider ways in which we may then go on to destabilise them.

In the game, the avatar-gamer subjectivity demonstrates our need for a separate subjectivity, and our humanistic aim for individuality, as I explore below with the example of personal space. Even whilst we experience the self as multiple through the relationship with the avatar, the desire to see the "self" as individual is experienced. Consider the following fieldnote:

> *In* World of Warcraft *you can stand in exactly the same place as another player (by this I mean that although there are certain solid objects in a game which you cannot walk into, avatar bodies are not a part of this). It is interesting therefore, that when I am in a dungeon I find it completely off-putting when someone stands in exactly the same space as me. There is no disruption to my action, and Etyme fires off her killing blows just as efficiently. However, I do not like it. I can't quite put my finger on what the problem is. There is some sort of an invasion of personal space, even though that space is not needed, or personal. I have to move Etyme out of the way, even just by a few steps. It disrupts the reality of the world for me, the reality of the space. I do not like to*

see it so crowded, and I am aware of giving my avatar that personal bubble in which she is free to move in, obeying the conventional laws of space. I do not like not being able to see her myself, even though this doesn't affect gameplay. I do not need to see her to "control" her actions. Interestingly, even when I can see her, I do not look at her. So it is odd, then, that when she is mixed in with a blur of bodies, I do not like it. It makes me feel uncomfortable. I have to move her to find a clear space for her to stand in, to claim as her own, for me to view her from.

In the above extract, the desire for "personal space" for the avatar is experienced as something that allows the "reality" of the subject, "obeying the conventional laws of space". Not having sight of Etyme is something which problematises the subjectivity that I have with her. It is "offputting", "I do not like it" and it "makes me feel uncomfortable". During these moments I felt very troubled by the "loss" of Etyme, and a strong desire to catch sight of her again – there was a strong affective and emotional reaction of feeling disturbed in some way. Jeffrey (1998: 1) states that invasions of personal space in social contexts 'produce signs of discomfort prior to eventual flight', and this is demonstrated above in the way that I am moved to move Etyme. Despite the fact that the gameplay is not impeded by sharing the space with other avatars it disrupts my sense of "self" – my sense as an autonomous being. This echoes the above analysis of the human understanding itself as separate from its surroundings. It is reiterated in the following fieldnote:

When I get into the battleground I'm reminded again about how, when everyone spawns in the same place, it makes you feel somewhat uncomfortable to not see your avatar. I've noted previously how this seems odd – I don't spend all of my time looking at Etyme so why should it bother me to not have that view of her? But it does. I'm obviously not the only one that feels this way: everyone moves themselves, their avatar selves, slightly away from the spawn spot, entering their own space, to create this non-disrupted view of their avatar selves. Maybe it's

that same discomfort of running through other people (this happens with NPCs who are marching for example). It seems incongruous, like you are a ghost.

In this second extract I not only seek reassurance that my response is "rational" (through justification that "I'm obviously not the only one who feels this way"), but I also question the legitimacy of the "self" when it is lost, feeling "like you are a ghost". These demonstrate the ways in which the subject as individual actually lend it its legitimacy and "life" – to liken the sharing of space to being ghost-like demonstrates a loss of self, and life. Personal space therefore becomes more than only a spatial configuring. It is what defines me as "me". DiPaola (1997: n.p.n.), writing about his experiences in designing effective avatar-gamer relationships (a concept he terms 'binding the pair'), notes personal space as indicative of a positive avatar-gamer bond. He states that users 'can feel uncomfortable when another avatar comes too close and "invades their personal space"', and that the uncomfortable feeling occurring also in virtual worlds indicates that users 'perceive at some level that they are really there with other people – avatars are perceived as beings not as objects being manipulated by other users on their home computers' (DiPaola 1997: n.p.n.). I would agree that this demonstrates avatars are perceived as beings rather than objects – if Etyme were an object why would it matter what space she occupied? Etyme being lost in other avatars doesn't affect gameplay; I can still target different individuals or monsters to attack and there are no ill-effects, so this desire for space is not linked to functionality. The desire for personal space therefore seems indicative of an understanding of her as subject, earning the affordances of respectful distance.

Following a study of personal space invasion in virtual worlds, Jeffrey and Mark (2003) discuss the implications of user's discomfort and suggest practical implications (if the player is playing in first-person perspective, standing too close impedes their view) and aspects of social etiquette (it may be perceived as "getting in someone's face"). However, I would suggest that more than this, the notion of personal space can be attributed to the humanistic desire for a separate subjectivity.

Jeffrey (1998: 1) defines personal space as 'an invisible area surrounding an individual which functions as a buffered comfort zone during interpersonal interaction'.

He explains that '[w]ithin physical environments, guidelines outlining appropriate behaviour and societal norms regulate individual behaviour during social interaction' (Jeffrey 1998: 1). This focus on a buffered comfort zone that denotes social norms also speaks to a sense of separation from one's surroundings, a desire to see the self as individual, unblurred from the environment. Returning to Pepperell (2003: 77), we previously saw his argument that '[i]n posthuman terms, […] humans are essentially indistinguishable from their environment. This is in contrast to the humanist view, which sees humans as essentially distinct from, in opposition to, and predominant within nature'. The performance of avatar "personal space" bizarrely echoes a humanist view where we desire to see the avatar as 'essentially distinct' from its environment, even whilst we do not always experience it as essentially distinct from ourselves as gamers. Thus even in an acknowledged posthuman subjectivity we cannot escape the overthrows of our humanistic upbringing, and we still desire the 'ideal of the unified, coherent, self-centered subject' (Rose 1998: 4). From this perspective our posthumanity is still entangled with our humanist history.

Motivation and achievement

How else can we view the implications of humanism at play in *World of Warcraft*? Whilst the above extracts demonstrate our *visual* desire for coherency and autonomy even within the gameworld, in the following section I trouble this reliance on individuality by demonstrating multiple ways to posthumanise the humanist notions of motivation and drive.

In Danziger's (1997) text *Naming the Mind* he devotes a whole chapter to Motivation and Personality, which chronicles the emergence of ideas concerning motivation. According to Danziger (1997: 102), '[b]oth the psychology of motivation and the psychology of personality were instructions of the inter-war period, the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century'. He explains that prior to World War I there was a dearth of psychological knowledge pertaining to notions of rewards and incentives (Danziger 1997). But from the 1920s onwards conceptions of character and interest,

satisfaction, work, desires, and the conflict of motives all began to appear (Danziger 1997; Rose 1990)[51].

Conation had been used to understand the notions of will and desire as internally dictated (Danziger 1997: 106). However, the appearance of "motivation" as a concept capitalised on how humans were objects open to manipulation (Danziger 1997: 106). An attribute that had previously been perceived as "internal" was therefore reconceived as a force that was open to, and guided by, "external" factors (Danziger 1997: 106). This shift was focussed on the idea of using motivation as an apparatus for social control – "personal direction" became the object to be manipulated by external influence (Danziger 1997: 106). However, this was not to suggest that motivation could be achieved by inflicting or forcing manipulation. Instead this manipulation had to occur in dialogue with the individual's desires and wishes that needed to be influenced and channelled in the right directions (Danziger 1997: 106). This enacted a dialogue between notions of internal and external, as '[d]esires and motives may be objects for the exercise of influence and control, but they also remain anchored into a discourse of subjective purposes and intentions. Bridging this duality was the fundamental theoretical task faced by the new psychology of motivation' (Danziger 1997: 106).

According to Danziger (1997), this constituted a significant shift in psychology. Whilst words such as will, desire, and wish had always been used in reference to human intentions, the notion of motivation grouped all of these ideas together, in order to imply that 'all action, no matter how trivial or habitual, is motivated, according to those who were selling motivation' (Danziger 1997: 105).

This claim is familiar to our subjective sense of self – the liberal human subject is conceived of as a rational entity that is both in control of their own actions but also responsible for their own desires. As Rose (1998: 1 and 12) explains: '[i]t is in terms of our autonomous selves that we understand our passions and desires […] 'free' individuals are enjoined to govern themselves as subjects simultaneously of liberty and of responsibility – prudence, sobriety, steadfastness, adjustment, self-fulfilment, and the like'. Where a humanist perspective might inscribe an 'autonomous individual striving

[51] Rose (1990) additionally notes that the end of the War also signified the emergence of consumer culture, which indicated the beginning of advertising and therefore a further focus on motivation from this perspective.

for self-realization' (Rose 1998: 17), a posthuman perspective on such desires would seek to embrace our goals and desires, our surroundings, and our "selves" as all being mutually entangled. The notion of motivation as being internally dependent and 'anchored into a discourse of subjective purposes and intentions' (Danziger 1997: 106) is therefore complicated by posthuman subjectivity. In this view, "motivations" emerge from an intra-action between "selves" and "situations": there is no anchor point. Furthermore, in gaming our motivation for betterment of "self" is also entangled with the betterment of the avatar, and I complicate this further below. Pepperell (2003: 140) suggests that our motivations for behaviour are always responsive, and to view our subjectivity as entangled is also to consider our motivations as emergent within that space. This is evident in gaming from the reward systems that are provided by the game, in terms of experience points, objects, or financial reward[52].

Castonova (2001: 14) links these reward systems to the notion of avatar capital – 'an enhancement of the avatar's capabilities through training'. As Castronova (2001: 14) explains:

> the avatar faces the same sort of social reward systems as are found in Earth society. The leveling and integration system also draws on the basic human tendency to get self-esteem from the opinions of others, and the result is that users are powerfully motivated to increase their avatars' abilities. Like the humans who imbue them, avatars find themselves on something of a treadmill of social success through avatar capital accumulation: they must work to advance, but each advancement raises the aspiration level and spurs them to still greater work.

[52] There are nevertheless those whose desire is to circumvent the traditional structure of motivation and reward as imposed by the game, by instead paying real money for in-game currencies, objects, or even avatars that are already of a high level (Nakamura 2009). This has led to a rise in "digital sweatshops", where players in poorer nations such as China or Korea are in fact worker-players, "farming" the game for goods to sell online (see Nakamura 2009; Goggin 2011; Tai and Hu 2017 for discussions). Often, these worker-players are subject to oppression and discrimination, both on and offline (Nakamura 2009).

If we compare the work that goes into the avatar-gamer subjectivity to the work that goes into the liberal human subject we can see many of the same structures are in place: 'inspecting oneself, accounting for oneself, and working upon oneself in order to realize one's potential, gain happiness, and exercise one's autonomy' (Rose 1998: 17). We can therefore see that even whilst this thesis has drawn on gaming as an example of posthuman subjectivity, the game is nevertheless based on (and for) a particular concept of "human" as someone who will work towards goals, striving to achieve progression and development. This indicates the way in which gaming itself is actually quite humanist. As Rettberg (2001: 25) states '[t]he *World of Warcraft* is a world in which work is valued as an end in it's own right'.

In videogames 'progress is largely about creating a sense of development […] Typical examples of progress in videogames revolve around level systems' (Ash 2012a: 14). "Levelling" (progressing through the levels in the game) is itself an example of the entangled form of motivation and reward that emerges through this subjectivity. I am driven to progress, but the "rewards" I reap are not only for "me"[53]. They are intra-actively experienced through the avatar:

> *At some indefinable point, things change. All of a sudden I am completely committed to gaining a deeper sense of "immersion" and understanding of this culture. Already the desire to "level up" is within me, and I am encouraged to hear from a guild member that once you reach Level 15 Level 30 is just around the corner. Level 15 means I can choose my specialisation, and I select Beast Mastery which means I can tame creatures. At Level 20 I choose a talent, and learn to ride a Hawkstrider. I am eager to reach Level 30 so that I can wear mail armour. I approach people in game and use the chat to appeal to other players for help in quests.*

[53] At a certain point during the PhD process there was an idea that I would continue to play until I reached the top level of the game. However, at the time of submission I have not reached it – it became an abstract goal, and was "humanistic" in nature. As a goal it demonstrates a certain desire for progression, as well as for a neatness to conclude the research that is elusive. This was also complicated through the expansion of the game during my studies that meant the top level shifted from 90 to 100. Furthermore, the game doesn't "end" at level 100 but instead signifies a shift in focus (see WoWPedia 2016 for further discussion) thus making this "completion" both more abstract and more elusive.

The fieldnote shows the ways that different levels signify a range of options for the avatar – expanding our skillset, through specialisations and talents, as well as gaining new armour (changing both aesthetic and ability, as well as being an acquisition of more possessions to demonstrate our success to other players) and learning to ride a new beast (signifying a change in how quickly we can travel around the world). These new options are therefore enacted through the avatar-gamer's progression as entwined. This desire to "work on myself" goes beyond the aesthetic choices and the "levelling" within the main body of the game: I also express a desire to become a "well-rounded" avatar-gamer subject through bringing my other skills "up to scratch", such as fishing, skinning, and leatherworking:

> *I continue to fish and progress to level 75, and then decide that my other "professions" should be brought up to scratch as well. The leatherworking was becoming increasingly difficult and then I realise in the low level (1-10) area I am in I can progress to learn journeyman leatherworking! I also learn first aid and cooking, which are basic skills like fishing. I've been stuck on 185 experience for skinning for some time now, and I realised that if I am progressing with the other skills, I might as well try and pick this one up again too. Leaving my laptop running the game, I use my mobile phone to look up online how to progress with skinning beyond the level I am at. I discover a very useful skinning guide, made by a* World of Warcraft *player, which indicates which areas I can travel to to hunt and kill mobs of the correct level to then skin their hides and increase my skill in skinning. One of the areas is close by, so I travel there and I'm pleased to progress beyond the skill experience of 200. Flying back to where I came from I am now able to learn expert skinning. Working on these skills is peaceful: it isn't hard, but still feels like you are achieving something, easily racking up the points and in the process making me feel that I am progressing well.*

These experiences demonstrate the inherent desire for progression and betterment, wanting to excel even in areas that are not "necessary" to the main progression in the game. Rettberg (2011: 20) argues that the precise reason *World of Warcraft* has such a devoted audience is that it 'offers a convincing and detailed simulacrum of the process of becoming successful in capitalist societies'. This links to Castronova's (2001: 16-17) analysis that

> [t]he process of developing avatar capital sees to invoke exactly the same risk and reward structures in the brain that are invoked by personal development in real life. [...] Constraints create the possibility of achievement, and it is the drive to achieve something with the avatar that seems to create an obsessive interest in her well-being.

However, this analysis demonstrates a very humanist conception: the gamer sees the avatar more as an external "object" of value than an entangled being. This can be likened to the notion of our actions and bodies as "properties". In such a view, 'abilities and personal qualities, as well as my actions and their products, are part of me only in the way that my house and my garden are part of me. They may be very dear possessions, but I will deploy them so as to gain the most benefit from them; in other words, I will use them *instrumentally*' (Danziger 1997: 47). This view is inherently flawed, and historically contingent as it again suggests an external vs. internal binary and I therefore consider below what it means to posthumanise this.

I would argue that we could consider "avatar capital" in posthuman terms. Rather than seeing the avatar as only a "possessed body" we could view it as an example of our entangled practices of achievement and capital: it is precisely through the levelling of the avatar, the myriad of emotions and affects which it solicits, the labour and the frustration, that posthuman subjectivity emerges. Between Etyme and I, then, we become our own life and life-force, with our own history. The "capital" worth or value that we accumulate is not, and never can be, "mine" alone. I can never claim my progression as individualised as it is distributed in the intra-action of "me" and "her", and the ways our posthuman "self" forms its own bonds to other places, times

and things. The posthuman lifecycle that Etyme and I have been through could be viewed as an example how our motivations and achievements are non-unitary (Braidotti 2013), and so working on the "self" is therefore more than individual. The posthuman subject is not master of its own life but 'is a transversal entity, fully immersed in and immanent to a network of non-human (animal, vegetable, viral) relations' (Braidotti 2013: 193).

The culmination of the work, effort and emotion that is expended in *World of Warcraft* is something of a Sisyphean task – there is no "end" to the game, unlike in more linear, narrative-based games. There is, however, a sense of pride and belonging as your proficiency in the game increases (see also Chapter 6 – Enacting Empathy). The "work" that you do is therefore always rewarded in some regard, whether publicly or privately, and this serves to "motivate" us. The following fieldnote demonstrates one of the ways in which the publication of achievements for others to view is particularly affective:

> *After the battleground finishes I'm aware of wanting to track my achievements – whereas many other (I expect more PvP experienced players) leave swiftly I loiter, trying to make sense of the statistics and understand this gameworld a little better. I am chagrined at the number of times I died, but buoyed by the number of killing blows I have dealt and the damage I have inflicted. This is not to do with a lust for violence, but for the opportunity for Etyme to be acknowledged as a valid and valuable member of a group. I feel sure I would feel much the same if I were a healer who had swooped in and saved another player from death. It is about your worth. Even in this fictional world we are creating contributing members of society.*

Danziger (1997: 113) explains that privileging historically contingent conventions and deeming them as "needs" enabled a shift towards promoting these same conventions, and this is particularly apparent in the case of notions of "achievement" and "self-realisation". The above fieldnote, therefore, demonstrates the enactment of being bound up in humanistic ideals, even when even when we are actively and consciously

acknowledging the "self" as posthuman. Rose (1998: 33) explores the conception of the human as 'selves with autonomy, choice, and self-responsibility, equipped with a psychology aspiring to self-fulfilment, actually or potentially running their lives as a kind of enterprise of themselves' (see also Foucault 2008). Whilst the entangled intra-action with Etyme demonstrates a lack of autonomy it nevertheless still aspires to self-fulfilment.

In lacking autonomy through the avatar-gamer subjectivity, the notion of independence is replaced with intra-dependence. As Hayles (1999: 3-4) states:

> the presumption that there is an agency, desire, or will belonging to the self and clearly distinguished from the "wills of others" is undercut in the posthuman, for the posthuman's collective heterogeneous quality implies a distributed cognition located in disparate parts that may be in only tenuous communication with one another. […] If "human essence is freedom from the wills of others," the posthuman is "post" not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will.

Agency, desire and will are therefore distributed to such a degree that there is no clear way to determine a single specific place or person that they emerge from. As I explored in the previous chapter, the desires of the avatar and the desires and of the gamer are intra-active and emergent: only through their entanglement can the game be played as both entities are reliant on one another. Hayles (1999: 288) continues by explaining that conscious agency is not, and has never been, in control, and that notions of "control" at all do not align with posthuman understanding of processes as emergent. "Mastery" is therefore merely a story that we construct to explain chaotic dynamics.

The reliance on the avatar as part of this emergence is apparent in the following fieldnote, where I discuss our progression as enmeshed with each other:

I'm about level 67 now, and whilst back when I first started playing as Etyme I presumed that being somewhere up this high would mean I had more of a grasp of the game, I don't actually feel like that is the case. In fact, in some regard I feel that whilst my avatar has improved her gameplay (she has better armour, deals out more damage, and has more spells and attacks to draw from) I feel I am sadly letting our tag-team down. I haven't learned yet how to put her to the best uses. Of course this she and me is both "I", which means I must also take credit for Etyme's successes, and she for my failures. I still feel like I am playing the game mechanically, and that the wider world of the game remains elusive to me.

The above section has therefore shown that notions of motivation are indeed subject to "external" influence, and are also bound with "external" achievement in that they do not always originate with, or end at, the "self" as a singular subject. But it has also demonstrated that such notions of external and internal are confused as it is not possible to draw clear lines around either, or to pinpoint where motivations begin (or end). Accordingly, we should understand our motivations and achievements instead as emergent within a particular set of circumstances and entanglements. As we strive to better ourselves we are moved by those forces, influences, and environments that both surround and create us. Our "motivations" emerge from within these intra-actions, provoking reaction. The fulfilment and realisation of our desires is also entangled – this fulfilment is not only a project of 'the universal subject, stable, unified, totalized, individualized, interiorized' (Rose 1998: 169) but is distributed. In this case it is the avatar-gamer entanglement that becomes the locus for our achievements. Without Etyme I could not progress, without the game structure there would be no "motivators", and without me the action could not unfold. However, beyond merely troubling the emergence of our motivations, what if we were to reconsider the importance of them altogether?

Attention and boredom

It could be argued that the notion of motive presupposes the self-governing "responsibility" of the human subject, which links us to Foucauldian notions of governmentality and "the good citizen". Yin Yap et al.'s (2010) analysis of the "good citizen" is applied to refugee's seeking "self-betterment" through volunteering. As they explain, the notion of citizenship focusses specifically on individuals as active and responsible subjects and constructs this as the desirable norm (Yin Yap et al. 2010: 161). Our predominant concern is therefore our own enactment of these ideals in order to embody and maintain the status of the "good citizen"; to 'strive for personal fulfilment […] to find meaning in existence by shaping its life through acts of choice' (Rose 1998: 151). Consequently, a focus on motivation and achievement demonstrates our desire to participate responsibly and actively in a community, to strive for fulfilment and find meaning in our existence. Within gaming there is a focus on progression, and we can see how being a "good" gamer is akin to being a "good citizen" including notions of entrepreneurialism and innovation. Ashton (2011: 309), for example, explains how the 'the logic of perpetual innovation is well entrenched within digital gaming culture'. Posthumanising these motivational factors above in order to account for the multiple influences and the entangled emergence of such desires nevertheless enacts a focus on these same humanistic goals, or "regulative ideals": 'ideals concerning our existence as individuals inhabited by an inner psychology that animates and explains our conduct and strives for self-realization, self-esteem, and self-fulfilment in everyday life' (Rose 1998: 3).

My proposal is that in humanistic understandings of subjectivity we are predisposed to highlight and accentuate certain actions and affects above others. Accordingly, an alternative way of "posthumanising" our subjective experiences would be to not only explore them as entangled, but to account for much more complex webs of affective feeling, beyond those that are seen as "desirable" in the "good citizen".

The experience of gaming is highly affective and emotionally engaging, as this thesis has demonstrated. However, beyond these visceral encounters it is important to note that the game can actually be unpleasant to experience. There has formerly been a focus on gaming as a "fun" activity which only delivers pleasure and feels like leisure. Whilst more recent critiques have explored aspects of the labour of play, or "playbour"

(e.g. Goggin 2011; Yee 2006; Tai and Hu 2017) there is still not a predominant focus on the *emotional* labour involved. However, gaming can be exhausting, and can incite feelings of anxiety, concern, unworthiness, ineptitude, guilt, frustration and panic[54]. This therefore positions involvement in a MMORPG such as *World of Warcraft* as something which is often beyond that of "play", through the emotional digital labour that is required/given. This argument then complicates the idea put forward by Graffam (2012: 132), that '[i]n essence, taking the form of an avatar allows people to interact in new and novel ways that push the boundaries they encounter in real life and *to derive a sense of enjoyment and fulfilment in ways that may be denied them in the real world*' (my emphasis) by destabilising the notion that pleasure and enjoyment are the primary affects of engaging in avatar-life. As Filiciak (2003: 99) states: 'the game is not always easy or pleasant'. Taylor (2006: 70) also points out: '[s]uggesting that games are always simply about "fun" […] is likely to gloss over more analytically productive psychological, social, and structural components of games'.

Using my fieldnotes to show the feelings of frustration, boredom, or disinterest at times associated with gaming therefore seeks to both demonstrate the complexity of the gaming experience but also to account for the complexity of all subjectivity. We are not merely motivated aspirational creatures of the good life, but are also entwined and entangled with mundane, or even what might be traditionally seen as "undesirable", affects. To critique the focus on "positive" affects (such as motivation) over "negative" affects (such as boredom)

> draws our attention to all those multitudinous programs, proposals, and policies that have attempted to shape the conduct of individuals – not just to control, subdue, discipline, normalize, or reform them, but also to make them more intelligent, wise, happy, virtuous, healthy, productive, docile, enterprising, fulfilled, self-esteeming, empowered, or whatever (Rose 1998: 12).

[54] It should, of course, be noted that these feelings that I experience should be read in context – my own motivation and experiences in-game cannot be extracted from the PhD process – I am gaming for a PhD, in itself an experience that can induce many of these feelings of anxiety too.

A focus on mundane or "undesirable" feelings also demonstrates an uptake of the posthuman – our experiences are no longer defined through humanistic notions of motivation as individual or even entangled, but our subjectivities also emerge in accordance with our boredom and indifference. Furthermore, such a focus demonstrates a middle ground between the utopian and dystopian views of online engagement, to not fetishise the digital and the posthuman but to normalise it through highlighting the very "human" feelings encountered there, taking up Braidotti's (2013: 90) call 'for resistance to both the fatal attraction of nostalgia and the fantasy of transhumanist and other techno-utopias'.

Along these lines, I argue that a posthuman view of subjectivity needs to account for moments of, for example, frustration, boredom, or disinterest in as much depth and with as much engagement as the liberal human subject attributed to "rationality", "reason", and "responsibility". In gaming this is demonstrated by a variety of experiences. For example, it is not uncommon for me to have periods of time when I am multitasking:

> *When you enter a new area there is a sort of magical sparkle noise to tell you that you have discovered somewhere new. How do you define a "magical sparkle" in noise form? A sort of tinkling, I guess. It's interesting because I'm never particularly bothered by that noise, I'm pretty focused on what I'm doing or where I'm going, so it doesn't bother me. But at this particular moment in time I am flying to a new location to seek out the correct area to carry out an objective for a quest. I need to lay a quest item between two large stacks of bones and draw spirits near in order to see them off. I'm still a short distance away and I'm flying on, my finger on the button; but I'm turned away, looking at something on my iPad and not concentrating at all on the landscape or surroundings in* World of Warcraft*. There are various interesting implications in this – the fact that real life habits follow you in to* World of Warcraft *is something I marvel at a little. In RL if I were to be on a journey and knew I had a minute to my destination I might idly take out my mobile phone, have a quick scan through twitter, check my email, etc. and here in* World of Warcraft *that*

habit seems to have followed me! Travelling time = potential moment of procrastination time.

As this fieldnote explains, like in "Real Life" I fill the idle moments in-game with another activity – fiddling about with another technological device and without my full attention on the game. We could conceive of this in posthuman terms in several ways. On the one hand, this demonstrates my continual entanglement with entities beyond the avatar and gameworld – as I have previously explained, the posthuman entanglement is not merely a co-construction between avatar and gamer, but is enmeshed within other environments and emerging through other intra-actions too. This fieldnote therefore demonstrates not only my own constant always-connectedness but how my habitual response to a moment of "down-time" is to reach out and connect elsewhere (see also Gregg 2015: 189), and so this networked habit happens even within a network. However, more than this, a focus on multitasking disrupts subjectivity as a responsible, motivated, attentive citizen. In accounting for our other engagements we can place a (posthuman) emphasis on these multi-layered experiences as constantly helping to shape our subjectivity.

There have also been instances where I have attempted to game whilst, for example, having the television on in the background, or having to answer the phone in the middle of playing in a dungeon and causing an in-game error due to this. Whilst these moments have in no way contributed to the "best" gaming experiences (they do not represent what some would argue as total "immersion" in the game and they display distraction rather than engagement), they are nevertheless experiences and demonstrate how the subjectivity shifts in response to a multiplicity of affects and entanglements, and is not always acting in accordance with expectations. This also links back to Barad's (2007: x) assertion that posthuman subjectivity is not just about binary co-production. As much as I have focussed on the avatar-gamer relationship in this thesis, this relationship cannot be meaningfully separated from its environment. It also demonstrates our multiplicity of beings. I am not only intra-acting with the game and the avatar, but also with a multitude of different technologies, scenarios, and others. In being more than just our "selves", '[t]he posthuman subject rests on the affirmation of

this kind of multiplicity and the relational connection with an 'outside' that is cosmic and infinite' (Braidotti 2013: 138). Our "distractions" are one example of this, whilst there are many others as this multiplicity and relationality is part of being.

As well as the game being a *part* of our life, and becoming part of our self-narrative, the game is also experienced in the same way as life – sometimes through moments of focus, sometimes through positive feelings and sometimes negative, sometimes in a drifting engagement, and at other times through boredom and frustration:

> *I become frustrated by a task which requires me to keep a constant eye on the mobs which are insisting on killing animals which I need for the task which I am doing. I am trying to let the animals respawn in the area so that I can harvest what I need from them, however the vicious mobs in the area are too busy attacking the animals and killing them for me to be able to do my job. I have to juggle completing the quest with culling the offending mobs who are interfering with it. What is interesting is the way in which this empathic exasperation mirrors exactly the experience. It is not just annoying because I find it annoying, it is annoying because it is interfering with the quest I have been given, and from any perspective that is frustrating. It is time consuming and for some reason I bore of it quickly today. There are times, when relative boredom or inactivity that is required from a particular quest can be quite soothing, engaging in an automatic response, in flow with the game. However, there are other times when it just doesn't suit my mood, and isn't what I want to do.*

Thus a myriad of emotions and affects, including moments of frustration and boredom, constitute the experience of gaming, constructing a subjectivity which is at once distributed, engaged, embodied, emotional, affected, and mundane. The attitude and actions of the enterprising self, which 'adopts self-betterment as its goal, and acts in accordance with this goal' (Yin Yap et al. 2010: 164), is seen as the "legitimate" and "valid" way to feel and act. However, this is contrasted against the self as frustrated, exasperated, or bored (as displayed in the above fieldnote) which is not seen as

desirable. We can see the strive for self-betterment specifically with regard to the affects we pay attention to in videogames, as Ash (2013: 28) argues that 'attuning oneself to the game involves a self-management of the affective and emotional state of being of the user in an attempt to minimize negative affects such as frustration and vulnerability'. It is a focus on, and attunement to, the more positive affects of the game that creates captivated and attentive subjects – who we could consider to be the "good gamers" that make games a commercial success (Ash 2013: 28).

What is interesting about Yin Yap et al.'s (2010: 165) analysis of the good citizen is the assertion that, in their study, 'constructing volunteering as a means of self-improvement, a hierarchy […] was invoked'. This is, of course, exactly in accordance with our everyday understanding of the subject as citizen. As Braidotti (2013: 35) explains, subjectivity 'involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values and hence also multiple forms of accountability' – we understand that we have a responsibility to act in accordance with certain goals and to be seen acting outside of this is negative, and we are accordingly moved down in the hierarchy of importance.

> This construction of the 'good' norm, compared with the 'bad', shapes how we think about citizenship and what constitutes a 'good' or a 'bad' citizen. Such norms create and reinforce in our minds, standards of desirable behaviour within society. We incorporate these ideals of good and bad citizenship into our own behaviour, thereby positioning ourselves in relation to these discourses. (Yin Yap et al. 2010: 161)

If posthumanism means disrupting hierarchies of self and other, man and woman, human and machine, as Braidotti (2013: 89) posits, I suggest we should extend this to a disruption of further "structural differences" of "good" vs. "bad". This would occur not only in terms of good/bad citizenship, but also in terms of actions, feelings, and affects. This seems a particularly relevant process for the posthuman condition to call into question, given how those notions are themselves only culturally and historically contingent. From this perspective being bored or unmotivated is seen not as a

consequence of individual "failing" and should not be juxtaposed against the "idealistic" subject as attentive. In this space, how might this enable us to consider such affects differently?

According to Rose (1998: 154), '[t]he enterprising self will make an enterprise of its life, seek to maximize its own human capital, project itself a future, and seek to shape itself in order to become that which it wishes to be. The enterprising self is thus both an active self and a calculating self, a self that calculates about itself and that acts upon itself in order to better itself'. We can see how working on ourselves and treating the "self" as a project has become part of labour practices – recent publications such as *Aesthetic Labour* (Elias et al. 2017) or *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory* (Scholz 2013) have demonstrated the ways in which both beauty politics and social media can be linked to neoliberal expectations. These expectations and perceptions assert that in order to do a job well we need to always "look the part" – which is in itself another form of labour. Whilst Rose (1998: 154) complicates the enterprising *self* by demonstrating the multiple ways in which notions of autonomy and individualisation have been used as forms of governmentality; my argument is that they have been used to shape and form ideals of a neoliberal, human subject that bear interrogating in a posthuman view.

Rather than viewing ourselves as autonomous and responsible for our own experiences, affects, motivations, and achievements, a posthuman view would account for these affects and achievements as distributed, and therefore only enabled through certain specificities of intra-action. This, I suggest, would point towards expanding a notion of posthuman ethics, especially in the current political climate where capitalism dominates. Even whilst right-wing political parties claim they are "for the people" and appeal to the general populous, they are adopting approaches that privilege those whose achievements fit a pre-determined ideal. Meanwhile, those who are not seen as self-regulating, self-motivated, or self-achieving are written out of benefit structures. An apt example of this would be the actions of President Trump of the United States of America who, in his inauguration speech, claimed 'the forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer' (BBC News 2017). However, within months of being in office, President Trump made a series of policy proposals that would be particularly damaging to the poor, including, for example, calls to repeal extensive parts

of the 2010 Affordable Care Act that provides health insurance to 20 million people (CNBC 2017). Proposals such as these demonstrate a disparaging and deprecating attitude towards those who are not able to provide for themselves, reinforcing the humanistic ideal that we are all masters of our own destinies, and those who are not achieving just aren't trying hard enough.

A distributed and emergent approach to achievement would instead mean, rather than congratulating ourselves for our achievements and judging others for their "lack" thereof, we instead begin to consider our "selves" as part of the entanglement that allows the emergence of the "success" (or "failure") of others. As Pepperell (2003: 172) states, if we do not see ourselves as separate from others in ways traditionally posed by humanist subjectivity, this can alter our treatment of others, and this relates to both human and non-human others. If we are all entangled then we must accept much more responsibility in the shaping of others, and be much more appreciative of the role of others in our shaping of our "self", as again these binaries become indistinct. Rather than a notion of "what goes around comes around" this is instead a suggestion that "what goes around *is*": it doesn't just "come around", it enables the emergence of other potentialities and agencies. As such we should become much more reflexive our actions to ensure that "what goes around" is supportive rather than restrictive, and this is therefore indicative of a posthuman ethic that emerges from our acknowledgement of our reliance on, and intra-connection with, human and non-human others (see also Braidotti 2013: 49).

A posthuman ethic becomes a way of living that focuses on our present as the development of our future: 'the future, and whatever benefits it may bring, is not something that just happens to us – we create it by our conduct in the present' (Pepperell 2003:172). In my theory of posthuman subjectivity, I extend this to notions of motivation and achievement. If we see ourselves as implicated in the emergence of an others' possibilities and potentialities, we might approach each other differently. Our "achievements" are never solely our own: they are entangled with, intra-dependent on, and emergent from the contexts and environments in which we operate. If we operate in unsupportive, unethical atmospheres with no opportunities, our achievements will be a reflection of that. Accordingly, rather than judging an "individual" on the record of

their achievements, we must assess their entanglements[55]. Ultimately this leads to a fundamental shift in our understandings of many of the structures that shape our behaviour, as in this entangled version of achievement the whole notion of meritocracy, capitalism, and neoliberalism are identified as being based on fallacies of the individual. These structures are therefore no longer supported, and a new, posthuman approach to our work and societies can emerge that is distributed, collaborative, entangled, and collective.

To account for our actions and affects as distributed, entangled, and intra-active therefore displaces the focus on 'individualization' (Rose 1998: 5). As Rose (1998: 170) explains, humans have traditionally been addressed and represented as a particular type that is:

> suffused with an individualized subjectivity, motivated by anxieties and aspirations concerning their self-fulfilment, committed to finding their true identities and maximizing their authentic expression in their life-styles. The images of freedom and autonomy that inspire our political thinking equally operate in terms of an image of each human being as the unified psychological focus of his or her biography, as the locus of legitimate rights and demands, as an actor seeking to 'enterprise' his or her life and self through acts of choice.

In this view, there is no room to see either success or boredom as a specific set of intra-actions that have enabled an emergent agency. Instead, each of our achievements – or lack thereof – is a personal responsibility, and failing.

When our processes of self-regulation and self-monitoring find us lacking this often leads us to experience feelings of self-depreciation when we perceive such personal failings. However, many of our experiences of "failure" are specifically dependent on the environments that have orchestrated them. Futility is an interesting

[55] The PhD process is an apt example of this – whilst it is my aim with this thesis to achieve the title of "Doctor Wilde", without the support of the many people and institutions (to name but a few influential factors) that have been a part of my life there is no way that that would have even been a possibility. My own doctoral progression is therefore entangled, and not simply "mine".

example of this. As a personal feeling of our efforts being fruitless, futility is often seen as a negative, emotional response to a scenario. Those who have experienced, and dared to share, feelings of pointlessness will be familiar with the phrases "cheer up", "try harder", or "just get on with it". These reactions demonstrate the very negative interpretation of feeling helpless or hopeless, and often responses to these moods again locate the responsibility for feeling within the self (see Rose 1998: 156-160). This demonstrates the idea of 'the 'autonomization' and 'responsibilization' of the self, the instilling of a reflexive hermeneutics which will afford self-knowledge and self-mastery' (Rose 1998: 157). This imposes a humanistic belief in becoming whole through self-realisation and mastery of one's own goals, mind-sets, achievements and emotional states (Rose 1998: 157). In this view we are in charge of our own happiness – and it is our responsibility to enact it (see Ahmed 2010 for further critique of the duty of happiness).

However, when we consider how feelings of futility play out we notice that they are rarely about the "self". Consider the following examples from my fieldnotes demonstrating frustration and futility in the game when I can't get to where I want to go. Although a "trivial" example the principles are the same – I want to keep progressing and achieving but there is an obstacle in my path and I am unable to move past this. In the following example I am stuck in a dungeon in-game, and cannot work out how to get back to my normal location in the game and continue with my quests.

> *Log back in and cannot believe that I am back at the start of this stupid dungeon with none of the objectives completed! Last time I logged out before I found the exit and so I have to do it all again*

Two days later…

> *Once again as I couldn't find the exit I am back at the beginning with the bosses still to defeat. I'm just not interested though, I'm thoroughly perplexed about how the hell I get out of this place and spend the whole time trying to find the*

way out and looking up maps, exits, chats online all trying to get out but still can't figure it out and have to log off

The day after that…

I'm genuinely beginning to feel concerned. I have a heavy feeling in my heart and a twist of unease in my stomach contemplating my body trapped in this space. I wander the same tunnels I have been for what feels like forever, trying to take a more methodical approach and pay attention to where one set of tunnels leads. I search again online for maps out, and chats about how to leave the tunnels, only to rediscover the same chats and the same maps that I have already looked at. There is a way of putting a ticket in if you are completely stuck in World of Warcraft *– glitches like this do happen where people are completely unable to move or get out of their current location. I'm beginning to wonder if I am in one of those scenarios, and that being stuck in this place is a glitch in the machine not a glitch in my gaming. But I'm not confident of that. Despite having been playing* World of Warcraft *for over a year now I wouldn't dream of having enough faith in my own ability to actually trust my judgement on this. I'm pretty sure that this is just me missing something, but whatever it is I'm missing I have been missing for days now!*

Eventually, I managed to get out of the dungeon and resume gameplay. In contrast to the above experiences that clearly demonstrate my annoyance, moving into boredom, moving into concern, the next fieldnote from the following day doesn't explain *how* I got out, which is interesting in itself, as it demonstrates that the futility was more noteworthy than the experience of freedom.

Nevertheless, the above fieldnotes clearly demonstrate the ways in which my affective responses are entirely intra-dependent on a range of factors beyond the "self". The environment, the circumstance, the situation I find myself in – all of these contribute to my feelings of frustration and futility. If we focus on the above scenario

we can see that I completed the dungeon several times, I logged in and out of the game, several days passed during which I kept trying to get out. I looked things up online, I explored the area, I considered whether it was a glitch in the machine – my frustration seems, frankly, well deserved! However, as Rose (1998:159) states: 'grief, frustration, disappointment, and death pose dangers to the regime of the autonomous self, for they strike at the very images of sovereignty, self-possession, omnipotent powers, secular fulfilment, and joy through life-style to which it is welded'. I would therefore suggest that such feelings and affects have been written out of the conception of the liberal human subject precisely because they destabilise the individualised, rational subject we are "meant" to be. We are taught not to focus on such affects – they are excluded from the notion of self as 'coherent, bounded, individualized, intentional, the locus of thought, action, and belief, the origin of its own actions, the beneficiary of a unique biography' (Rose 1998: 3). Accordingly, a posthuman subject must put these feelings "back into the picture" in order to acknowledge what posthuman experience is.

Development, memory and nostalgia

Memory and development are two other aspects of psychology that have led to a promotion of understanding our selves in a way that adheres to a linear lifecycle. One of the most intriguing and compelling aspects of my experience in *World of Warcraft* has been my tendency to engage in nostalgic practices when in the game. Being driven to go back to places where I had started out in the game is, again, somewhat inexplicable. Why go back? What waits for me there? It's a practice that, according to the ludic and narrative of the game, has no purpose or reasoning:

> *I'm going back to where my journey began, for no particular reason other than a sense of nostalgia driving me on. I also want to meet others just starting on their journey and revisit foes who once almost defeated me, almost as though I am looking back fondly at where I once was compared to what I have now become.*

What is interesting about this is that, as Hui (2011: 65) explains: '[n]ostalgia is often understood as an inability to go back, a sickness from being unable to return. Though temporally this may be the case, as the past cannot be revisited, affects such as nostalgia are linked to material spaces, and can have enduring relationships with space'. The act of my travelling back through the game space, through *World of Warcraft*, to actually revisit the (immaterial) space where I first appeared as an avatar in-game extends this idea of nostalgia being linked to a material space into an immaterial place. Hui (2011: 68) makes a distinction between material space and immaterial place: place 'as an immaterial entity arising from the placing, ordering, and representing of material objects […] place results from the process of interacting in material surroundings'. Whilst in *World of Warcraft* there is no materiality to the space, it is nevertheless possible for the avatar-gamer to revisit different areas in the game as though they were spaces. However, when going back to those areas with Etyme, my sense of it as a "place" was somehow unreachable as my feelings towards the space and my actions there had changed. Where it was formerly a place of learning and advancing, the engagement with it as a much higher-level avatar meant that there was an "inability to go back": experiencing it a second time with Etyme was not like the first time. Even if I were to create a new avatar to start again from scratch the interaction would still be changed from that first time, thereby not fulfilling the nostalgic yearning for what is an irrecoverable feeling, moment or state based in the past.

It is also as though in the progression of the game, in the completion of quests and the levelling of my character, I look back on where I started as though the game experience were a lifecycle of sorts:

> *It's really interesting looking back through my notes from a year ago and noticing how even then I was revisiting places I had previously been and completing the quests that I had missed there first time round. Considering this is something I have recently been doing, again, months on, I'm intrigued by the idea of nostalgia in games and the circling cycling lifecycle of the avatar. Looking back through my notes is like a journal of a growing person, feelings of*

wanting to grow up, feelings of loneliness, feelings of not belonging, feelings of coming into my own and becoming my own person...

It is intriguing to think of this idea of nostalgia as being directly linked to that of a lifecycle, and this draws on a very humanist discourse of development and growth. Routledge et al. (2011: 638) 'examined the possibility that one source of meaning in life emanates from the human capacity to think in terms of time and thus to engage in nostalgic reflection on the past'. It is a possibility that enables us to begin to conceptualise the way in which the feeling of nostalgia was experienced in-game with reflection on a former state of being.

This is echoed in the periods in game of loneliness and not belonging which seemed almost like an adolescent stage of gaming, and the fact of this re-occurrence with nostalgia at different points throughout the game is interesting too:

I miss the purpose behind the "lower level" quests as I now feel like I am in World of Warcraft *adolescence. I have grown beyond where lower level quests usually reach (maybe level 20? I am now 27) so have been playing some dungeons – a few days ago did two dungeons with the same group which was good to actually have an experience of that – sticking together beyond one "scene". However, it soon fell apart and people started to leave the group. The adolescence-like feeling is because I have outgrown the smaller quests but do not quite understand the bigger quests. I understand some of the dungeons and the battlegrounds but I'm sure there is something I am missing. I'm not far from level 30 so I wonder if when I reach that some new doors will open? As it is I have been accepting some lower levels quests which still yield high XP (experience points) to give me some motivation, some sense of purpose! It is odd that in the cities you cannot move (metaphorically speaking) for people but in the wilderness there is no one. A level 21 player challenged me to a duel but was immune to all of my attacks, and beat me easily which was somewhat embarrassing, so I just got on my Hawkstrider and ran off. Not long after I wished I had stayed to see if they were up for a chat or a quest! I definitely think*

> *I need to find a new guild to join but I don't know how to differentiate between good and bad, or where I belong or will find what I am looking for. This is even more like adolescence – trying to find which group to fit in. Who shall I become? A raider, a socialite? Like trying to define yourself as grunge, goth, townie, emo.*

The desire for development that we can see above is part of the normative, deeply humanist framings of subjectivity: striving to achieve more, develop more skills, and gain more knowledge. However, from a posthuman perspective, we can reconsider these notions of development in order to acknowledge their humanistic roots, and account for their deep entanglements, as I explore below.

One of the ways in which we can begin to pull apart these feelings of nostalgia, the lifecycle, the journey and the striving and acquisition of new skills is by considering how the growth and development of a subject shapes subjectivity, and that the ability to reflect back on our past is, too, crucial to a "human" experience of life, and how we make sense of our "selves". The occurrence of nostalgia shows how the experience in game echoes how we experience and understand our life as being linked implicitly to a sense of linearity, through our childlike behaviour at first (e.g. not understanding how to work the game, getting the controls wrong, and not understanding the game mechanics until we have learned how to navigate the "world") but also through those feelings of growing, changing, and then reflecting back on what was.

Routledge et al. (2011: 639) suggest that 'nostalgia may provide a way to conjure up evidence that their lives have indeed been meaningful. It may be, in a sense, the self-focused emotional process through which people recollect experiences that weave a meaningful narrative around their lives'. The avatar is intrinsically linked to this process. It would have been much quicker for me to revisit the early areas where I started out in *World of Warcraft* by creating a new character starting in that area. But it was specifically Etyme and I going back that was key to the desire: seeing how far *we* had come, what *we* had achieved, how *we* had grown and developed and changed. This action brought up memories of our having been there before, quantifying and justifying our "life" through our past experiences.

These notions of the lifecycle and linearity are essential to consider as they are actually specific enactments of our understandings of subjectivity – 'the past can also be a vital resource on which one might draw to maintain and enhance a sense of meaning' (Routledge et al. 2011: 650). As the above sections demonstrate, we are taught to focus on progression and achievement. As Rose (1998: 22) explains:

> human beings have come to understand and relate to themselves as 'psychological' beings, to interrogate and narrate themselves in terms of a psychological 'inner life' that holds the secrets of their identity, which they are to discover and fulfil, which is the standard against which the living of an 'authentic' life is to be judged.

In the same way that the above section on Motivation and Achievement could be understood as posthumanising those deeply humanistic aspects of "selfhood" and psychology in multiple ways, so too can we read multiple posthuman analyses of memory and nostalgia. The feelings that are discussed in my fieldnotes both compliment and complicate this idea. On the one hand, my fieldnotes demonstrate this narration of self-as-linear, the desire to fulfil myself and progress. However, on the other hand, the notion of nostalgia complicates the focus on progress.

The idea of childhood, adolescence and growing up demonstrates a narrative of "Storying a Self" (Rose 1998: 173-182)[56]. As Polkinghorne (1991: 136) has suggested, 'individuals construct private and personal stories linking diverse events of their lives into unified and understandable wholes. These are stories about the self. They are the basis of personal identity and self-understanding and they provide answers to the question, "Who am I?"'. As such, in the fieldnotes I am narrating my "life" in ways that create a specific subject position of the avatar-gamer as posthuman subjectivity. However, this demonstrates another of the ways in which we still attempt to make sense of our (posthuman) subjectivities in humanistic ways. Although the fieldnotes still demonstrate the shift in "I" that speaks to an entangled state rather than a particular

[56] See also Burman (2008) for her deconstruction of the psychology of child development.

localised, focussed, or individual "I", the notion of these entangled experiences as linear is linked to very specific understandings of "self" as I explore further below. Etyme's and my story is structured through the influence of narrative to account for our experiences in a historically and culturally developed sense-making practice (Rose 1998: 175-6; Polkinghorne 1991). As Rose (1998: 175-176) states: 'people come to know themselves as persons of a particular type through an act of mutual recognition […] In explicitly or implicitly organizing their relations to themselves and others in terms of such narratives, a self is, as it were, "storied forth", the individual choosing among the different narrative forms to which he or she has been exposed'. Polkinghorne (1991: 137) has explained this narrativising process as one which makes individual units of action meaningful, through their significance in relation to the "wholeness" of the story of our lives. Stories therefore structure our experiences, producing a particular sequence and sense of development (Polkinghorne 1991: 138-139). Whilst my autoethnographic approach shows this to a certain degree (see Chapter 3: Embracing Methodological Contradictions), what these extracts demonstrate is not only a particular enactment of a (posthuman) subjectivity, but the influence of the desire for understanding the self as linear, progressive, growing, and meaningful. Thus the posthuman subject is once again constrained by humanistic ideals, but still serves to displace them through distribution rather than individuality, heteronomy rather than autonomy, and affectivity rather than rationality.

Another reading of nostalgia might complicate humanistic linearity and development still further. As Seaman (2005: 22) explains: '[m]emory provides many associations that link back to each of the differing sensual qualities registered at the time of the initial experience i.e. a smell can trigger a strong memory of an alternate place and time' and this is useful in terms of accounting for a posthuman understanding of self, subject, and object. Memory itself is a demonstration of entangled experience. Rather than a coherent story for a rational self, we experience our reflections as constantly enmeshed within different feelings, affects, environments, and understandings of both "self" and situation. Pepperell (2016: 332) has explored this in posthuman terms by asserting that 'mind and the memories associated with it are not solely attributable to the brain, let alone any 'circuit' within the brain. Mental events are distributed through the brain, body and the world, across space and time'. This therefore

further demonstrates our entangled and enmeshed selves. Even our memories, which contribute so much to our understanding of "self", are not our own, and are intra-dependent on a variety of contributing factors.

Nostalgia then is an affect that eludes humanistic separation – by focussing on our past we are "neglecting" our future – an unforgiveable act! If, as Polkinghorne (1991: 144-145) suggests, '[t]o experience life as a meaningful whole, one must maintain and preserve the self against internal dissolution into its component parts' and that '[t]he primary process of narrative configuration is identification of beginning and ending events', nostalgia troubles this temporal figuration by not seeing an event as finite. This enacts a dissolution of linearity: looking back is not only an act of remembering but an act of reconfiguring, and in that way works as a practice of viewing the "self" as emergent. A focus on yearnings such as nostalgia troubles the humanistic goal for self-regulation as these feelings instead emphasise regulation through the "other".

Polkinghorne (1991: 150) has written of the despair that can follow the dissolution of self-narrative. However, again, this is much more to do with our humanistic desire for a "meaningful" life. As Pepperell (2016: 331) states, 'we misunderstand what it is to be a human if we confine humanity to any specific object or process'. Practices of governmentality have often led to anxiety and depression through their demonstration of our "inadequacy" (see, for example, Nafus 2016). Notions of linear progression and development are likely to do the same when they become measures for individualistic "success" and "progression". Instead, by engaging with events and memories as posthuman entanglements those events and memories should be freed from humanistic constraints to attribute meaning for the self, so they can instead demonstrate how '[m]ental events are distributed through the brain, body and the world, across space and time' (Pepperell 2016: 332).

The distribution of the self makes memory both more pivotal in posthuman subjectivity – as a demonstration of our intra-connectedness – but also more problematic, as our engagement with memory and self-narrative must become more reflexive and critical lest we slip back into understanding the self as master of our own successes. Polkinghorne (1991: 149) has stated that '[w]hen the operating plot begins to

disintegrate, one's identity loses its unity'. Rather than cause for concern, my theory of posthuman subjectivity would embrace this as a liberation from constrictive bounds of unity. Reconstructing our *posthuman* "life story" therefore becomes a process of acknowledging the external much more than the internal, and allows further possibility and openness towards multiple ways of being, freed from expectations of coherency and linearity. Rather than creating a new plot that links together 'previously disparate events into a new whole' in order to provide 'the reintegration and renewal of self' (Polkinghorne 1991: 151), my version of posthuman subjectivity would circumvent the former focus on plot and unitary subjectivity in favour of multiplicity. This aligns with Braidotti's (2013: 49) work, and affirms the posthuman as a subject 'that works across differences and is also internally differentiated'.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated some of the ways in which we might begin to broaden our conception of posthuman subjectivity by exploring what motivates us, what feelings have gone unaccounted for, as well as by suggesting that embracing our entangled affects might move us towards a more ethical understanding of our "selves" and "others".

Posthumanising subjectivity in this way entails accounting for the myriad of our entangled experiences that have previously gone unaccounted in liberal humanist concepts of the self, and reading them not as "negative" experiences, but as entangled, affective experiences influenced by a variety of intra-acting components. Rather than berating ourselves for being bored, we might learn to embrace it and consider: what happens within the boredom, where is it emerging from, how can we account for it, and what other entities within our intra-actions are also bored. Rather than striving for linearity we might instead account more freely for the complex understandings of time, memory, and experience, to more actively engage in the process of remembering and melancholy. Within a culture where experience is something that must be hurried past, we might spend more time focused on and exploring it, in order to consider more openly how we are shaped by that which has gone before.

Rethinking the "human" is about more than just rethinking "who" the human is, what rights they have, and how they interact (or intra-act) with their environments. It should also be about considering what it means to live in these entangled ways and, crucially, how it feels. I have stated before that we have not yet escaped the overthrows of our humanist history to move away from a conception of the "I", and that instead we must critique and critically extend this "I" to examine in detail what is meant by it (see Chapter 3: Embracing Methodological Contradictions). We must therefore do the same for all of our practices, experiences and affects, in order to adopt a posthuman approach to conceiving what this entity of the "I" does and is. It *is,* not only in what we name it, but also in the ways that we account for it. As Rose (1998: 3) explains, he feels an 'unease about the values accorded to the self and its identity in our contemporary form of life, a sense that while our culture of the self accords humans all sorts of capacities and endows all sorts of rights and privileges, it also divides, imposes burdens, and thrives upon the anxieties and disappointments generated by its own promises'. Is this not exactly what we see elsewhere in the liberal human subject? Not only have women, ethnic minorities, disabled people, and LGBTQ+ people traditionally been written out of a culture that privileges the white, able-bodied, property-owning male with the right to vote. We also 'feel obliged to posit ourselves as subjects with a certain desiring ontology, a will to be' (Rose 1998: 188). Yet feelings and affects that do not fit with this obligation have also been written out too, seen as shameful – and therefore anyone experiencing them has been deemed subordinate too. The reach of the liberal human subject has spread wide, and in order for posthuman subjectivity to readdress what it means to be "human", it must account for affects and emotions too. This means not only accounting for our feelings as entangled, but accounting for our emphasis and celebration of certain feelings over others.

This is a complex ethical task. As Rose (1998: 167) writes: '[t]o claim that values are more technical than philosophical is not to denounce all values, but it is, perhaps, to suggest the limits of philosophy as the basis for a critical understanding of ethics'. Am I suggesting that posthumans should be bored, nostalgic, inactive creatures? No. What I am suggesting is that in rethinking the human we should acknowledge that we always *have been* bored, nostalgic, inactive creatures, as much as we have ever been motivated, progressive, active ones. Boredom, for example, is not simply opposed to

attention, but is part of what makes attention possible, they are entangled, as are "success" and "failure". In re-establishing a notion of posthuman "self", this is therefore our opportunity to write such affects back into being, to account for ourselves as complex, embodied, entangled creatures subject to a range of experiences, each of which has their place in the world and our intra-action with it.

Rather than merely a critique of the psychological subject, this chapter has shown how the posthuman subject can become a more empathic and ethical creature through the acceptance of its multiplicity. As Braidotti (2013: 100) identifies, the 'humbling experience of not-Oneness' can create spaces to explore a range of productive questions. In the context of this thesis those questions have been: why must acting have a pilot and a master? and what happens if we disrupt these notions and focus on what acting can show us within its intra-action as a demonstration of the performance of posthumanism?; why should empathy involve self/other differentiation?; what happens if we extend our use of posthumanism into this "ability", seeing it as evidence of our constant connection to the world, and embracing our responsiveness?; why should subject formation only focus on rational, reasonable and positive feelings from a place of autonomy?; what happens if we bring boredom, frustration, nostalgia, and the mundane back into the picture?; how does accounting for these feelings lend a different significance to our experiences, and adjust our own view of our intra-action in the world? This thesis has hoped to go some way towards answering these questions, and showcasing posthuman subjectivity as intra-active, empathic, inactive, entangled, nostalgic, and emergent.

Chapter 8: A Contingent Conclusion

Introduction

It is my argument that, given the problems with the traditional notion of the "human", posthumanism is a realm of critical enquiry that can help us to explore our subjectivity in ways that acknowledge and accommodate how we are influenced by, and comprised of, what were previously considered "external" forces. This thesis has therefore investigated different aspects of posthuman subjectivity through a specific, technologically situated model.

Summarising the thesis

I began this thesis by proposing the posthuman gamer. I have used the MMORPG avatar-gamer as one example of the embodiment of posthuman subjectivity in order to explore new ways of understanding our "selves" as entwined entities. The MMORPG avatar-gamer has been a useful case to consider how we experience a posthuman subjectivity as an engagement with technology, and I have shown how even in these complex entanglements of human and machine we cannot make the distinction between "self" and "other" clearly. When the "other" is a technological, digital being inside a machine, we are not separate from our intra-action with one another. Whilst technology is not a necessary proviso of the posthuman condition or subjectivity, this is an increasingly accessible example that can show the intra-action of multiple entities. I have drawn on various theories of posthumanism to argue that the avatar-gamer is an amalgamation of material and informational entities (as per Hayles 1999) and that the "human" and "machine" in this entanglement are not ontologically distinct. Instead, the specific individualities of "human" and "avatar" are only defined in relation to one another, dependent on what each enables the other to do. This draws on Barad's (2007) notion of relational ontology, where the distinct traits of each entity are only articulated through a discursive meaning-making that separates self from other. However, the reliance on the "other" to quantify the "self" enacts their entanglement further. The "me", "she", "we" fluctuation in fieldnotes has been an apt demonstration of this.

Writing about the *self* and *my* experiences as *I* play the game and connect with *my* avatar in this research project could be considered problematic given that posthuman acknowledgement that self/my/I is a flawed conception and the proposal that we should be turning away from anthropocentrism. However, in Chapter 3: Embracing Methodological Contradictions, I read the "I" of the autoethnography through the lens of posthumanism – accepting that this "I" is made up of a multitude of different components and that the self is 'always relational, always defined by its interconnections with others' (Blackman 2008: 117). To some degree the "I" I employ throughout the thesis aims to destabilise anthropocentrism through its emphasis on the avatar as an integral entity in the posthuman subjectivity.

Using the avatar-gamer posthuman subjectivity as a case study, I began by complicating the notion of the posthuman subject through the methodological implications of a posthuman "I". If we are not ontologically distinct, what right do we have to speak from the position of an "I"? This is undoubtedly a complex and arguably contradictory approach. Nevertheless, I have argued that as posthuman as we might be, we are still deeply entrenched in humanistic sense-making practices. Throughout the thesis, I aim to destabilise these, rethinking, and posthumanising them. However, I do not think their use is completely at an end. Whilst we can, and should, critically re-examine taken for granted assumptions about the "human", I do not believe this necessarily means we have to radically depart from everything we have ever known. In this way I draw on recent suggestions that 'rethinking might therefore involve the remembering of certain theories of the self […] which – 'with some refurbishment' – remain 'fit for purpose', as well as generating new theoretical lenses through which to look at digital relationalities' (Ferreday 2013: 54). For example, the "I" is used as an indication that as entangled as we are, we are still embodied, and part of our entanglement is still within a humanistic practice of sense-making. This needs to be disrupted to consider what the "I" is, but we can refurbish, reconceptualise and redefine without ultimately removing these notions from our vocabulary. More than just a methodology, this demonstrates the first aspect of the contribution this thesis has shown – that of how to "posthumanise" certain concepts.

Therefore, the process of "posthumanising" that I have used throughout the thesis allows us to recycle and "update" certain humanist concepts, retaining their

usage, but adjusting the critical and conceptual underpinnings that influence how we understand and interpret the self. The posthuman "I" is the first example of this. To radically depart from any self-referential practices seems to be, frankly, both unlikely and ultimately unhelpful. As Blackman (2012) has stated, we have the ability to live singularity even in the face of our multiplicity, and I do not necessarily view this as a negative – as long as we acknowledge that multiplicity.

Some more radical posthumanists might argue that this only serves to re-establish the "I" as a locus of control and humanist accountability. However, I believe that using the "I" whilst understanding and recognising our entanglements, the distribution of our agency and the emergence of self as being contingent on "others", becomes a critically reflexive practice. This means using the "I" as an unstable, shifting and emergent entity. Butler (2005: 41-42) argues that approaches such as this would allow

> an ethics based on our shared, invariable, and partial blindness about ourselves. The recognition that one is, at every turn, not quite the same as how one presents oneself in the available discourse might imply, in turn, a certain patience with others that would suspend the demand that they be self-same at every moment. Suspending the demand for self-identity or, more particularly, for complete coherence seems to me to counter a certain ethical violence, which demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same.

I would argue that this recognition of, and patience for, the multiple "selves" we each embody aligns with further aspects of a posthuman ethic that I have suggested, that include an acknowledgement of our selves and our actions as always entangled and never individually "owned".

Having proposed the posthuman gamer, and justified the posthuman "I", I then went on to use a posthumanised autoethnographic methodology to explore the avatar-gamer subjectivity in a variety of ways. This has been something of a journey through different fields, that broadened the scope of the research at each level. I have demonstrated how our activities (such as acting) our social, affective intra-actions (such

as empathy) and our own understandings of self (through psychological subject formation) can also be posthumanised.

Initially, I drew on my background in performance and acting to examine my fieldnotes, considering acting theory as one way to analyse the subjectivity between avatar and gamer. However, as I stated in Chapter 5, much of the acting theory that I drew on was situated in a heavily humanistic understanding of self. Using the work of theatre practitioners Stanislavsky and Chekhov, I demonstrated how these theories explored the actor-character relationship in ways that seemed at times to suggest that the actor was consciously in control of their decisions and exerted a certain power over their performance of a character.

Nevertheless, I saw potential in their work to "posthumanise" their techniques – considering the actor not as a master in control of their character, but the relationship between character and actor as a further example of distributed agency and posthuman subjectivity. Exploring aspects such as given circumstances, the "magic if" and involvement in the story, I developed a posthumanised version of acting theory. This viewed the agency between character and actor as equal and emergent, and proposed performance as an embodiment of the entangled webs of actor, character, director, script etc. and as a relational ontology (Barad 2007) where each contributes to the construction of the other. This chapter focussed on a more text-based analysis of the gameplay, considering aspects such as character choice and appearance, the background narrative of each avatar, and the incorporation of this information into the emergent posthuman subjectivity.

As I demonstrated at the beginning of Chapter 6, the actor in the theatre utilises certain aspects of empathy in order to understand and perform their character. I, therefore, broadened the scope of my initial claims by moving the analysis away from the specificities of performance as a particular practice or profession. Shifting my focus from text-based engagements to more affective experiences I analysed fieldnotes through the use of empathy, which allowed a further insight into how posthuman subjectivities emerge from the intra-action between entities. Again, I problematised some of the more "humanistic" notions of empathy such as the suggestion of a rational, stable, autonomous individual who takes part in "other"-oriented perspectives and must avoid a loss of self (see, for example, Coplan 2011). This clear cut definition between

self and other is problematic to the experience of empathy in gaming, as in gameplay the avatar is often not experienced in such definite and simple terms. Quite clearly the avatar is not entirely "self" – yet it is not entirely "other" either. To account for this complexity, I provided a posthuman understanding of empathy that understands that "humans" are always in fusion with "others". Posthuman subjectivity offers a way to conceptualise this, as the "boundaries" between self and other are refuted, and instead subjectivity is seen as 'emergent rather than given, distributed rather than located solely in consciousness, emerging from and integrated into a chaotic world rather than occupying a position of mastery and control removed from it' (Hayles 1999: 291). Rather than viewing empathy as solely a "looking out" but instead considering it as an "incorporating in" this intra-subjective experience creates the posthuman subject as actions are taken and scenarios are acted out.

From text-based and affective intra-actions that demonstrate the emergence of posthuman subjectivity in a specific context, I then moved to consider how this posthuman subjectivity negotiates our actual sense of "self". I have explored fieldnotes that show how I am still affected in humanistic ways even in an environment that I have purposefully entered to explore posthumanism. This shows how strongly embedded these humanistic understandings of selfhood are. Drawing on psychological understandings of self-development, linked to notions of motivation, achievement, attention and memory, I consider how these occur through the avatar-gamer entanglement. Challenging these facets of "self" as taken-for-granted assumptions about what we "should" be and how we "should" behave, I have then considered the potential to posthumanise these also.

This final theme broadened the scope of this research further, in order to provoke debate on what a posthuman understanding of "self" might look like, beyond acknowledging the intra-dependence on the "other". I suggested that in focussing on ourselves as projects and claiming our achievements as our "own" we are still demonstrating humanistic tendencies – even when we consider ourselves posthuman. I proposed that a posthuman subject should also problematise these progressive stances, and instead aim to more openly acknowledge and incorporate the messier aspects of subjectivity. This practice is twofold. Firstly, it involves accounting for the ways in which our "achievements" and "developments" are themselves entwined and enmeshed

with the circumstances, environments, and "others" around us. Secondly, it requires a shift to acknowledge that the motivated "self" is entangled with boredom, that our reliance on memory to construct and develop the self is complicated by feelings of nostalgia, which in turn demonstrates the non-linear (post)human experience. This proposal opens up a new space for posthuman ethics to develop. This involves distancing ourselves from problematic practices of self-governmentality and the good citizen, by moving towards a more open and relational understanding of these affects being mutually constituted by that which is around us. It also acknowledges these progressive desires and actions as being inherently bound up in feelings that were previously considered less "positive" or aspirational.

Contributions to knowledge

The significance of this research project is therefore multiple, and I see the three main contributions as follows. First of all, I have identified an everyday example of posthuman subjectivity and, through an in-depth empirical account, have demonstrated one of the ways in which we might begin to understand ourselves as posthuman. Gaming demonstrates a clear and everyday application of posthuman theory, therefore making theory useful and relevant through demonstrating its application through a popular way of engaging with the media. It is important that we explore the relationship between the body and the screen, between human and machine, because these relationships are becoming more prolific and we need to understand how they create subjectivities. This research will, therefore, contribute to the field of game studies as it has conceptualised and developed a new way of understanding the avatar-gamer subject through posthumanism. Furthermore, this may have wider application for those researching and exploring digital cultures in other areas, as this model of the posthuman subject could be transposed into other environments.

Secondly, I have used traditionally "humanist" concepts and "posthumanised" them to make sense of this emergent version of subjectivity. Through both my methodology and through the themes covered, I have used commonplace practices, affects, and understandings of self, thus demonstrating how being posthuman feels very human. In order to explore the posthuman as something that is accessible, useful, relevant and neither a utopian dream nor a dystopian nightmare I have not attempted to

detract from our very "human" nature, or the ways in which we usually live, explain, negotiate and narrate our lives. Instead, I have articulated a space in between the utopian and dystopian versions of posthumanism by establishing that posthuman subjectivity is as complex a subjectivity as any other we embody.

Thirdly, the methodological implications of a posthuman autoethnography have negotiated the provocations and potentials of using the "I" in an entangled way. The use of a posthuman "I" has conceptualised and delivered a difficult methodology that emerges from an understanding of the tensions between these positions, but nevertheless justifies the posthuman "I" as contingent, contradictory, and multiple. This provides a posthuman subject that is both radical but accessible – radical in its multiplicity, in the incorporation of different subject positions, and in the negotiation of an entanglement – but accessible in a narrative form and through the use of the "I" – that historic fallacy of selfhood that we nevertheless rely on to make sense of our experiences.

Each of the themes also demonstrates an original contribution to their specific field, and therefore may be of use individually to scholars within actor training, the study of empathy, and psychological understandings of selfhood and subjectivity. However, more than that, they are a significant and original contribution to posthuman studies. Together, they have shown just some of the ways in which we can see how posthuman subjectivity emerges. By "posthumanising" as a diffractive re-reading of taken-for-granted humanistic assumptions, I have shown a framework through which further themes and understandings of self might also be updated. I have therefore presented the ways in which posthuman subjectivity can be understood through much of what we already do – if we simply learn to read these activities, affects and actions in different ways.

I have drawn on a variety of fields that have developed relatively recently, from posthumanism, to game studies, to affective methodologies. There are therefore many potential avenues for the future development of this research. Posthumanism and the posthumanities are evolving fields, and demonstrate a significant shift in our understandings of our place in the world, and in what we are. The model I have proposed in this thesis can be applied in a variety of other contexts, to not only claim other subjectivities and entanglements as posthuman, but to then critically explore the

specificities of how they emerge. Posthumanism is a way of doing this that can account for "new" subjectivities whilst also explaining the old. Posthuman subjectivities have always been, and therefore as much as the theories relate to the present and future, they can also be applied to the past.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by updating our concepts, rather than just "being" posthuman, "doing" posthumanism is therefore about what we focus on and how we understand different things as important. We can begin to promote and live a more posthumanly ethical life by complicating these, and arguing for a wider emphasis on not only our "selves" but also our "actions" as entangled. For example, by focussing on the self as multiple, and accepting we are not singular (as evidenced in this thesis through acting and empathy), and paying attention to the idea that some affects, actions and qualities being perceived as "good" while others may be seen as "undesirable" is a particular construction that needs re-interrogation (as discussed in Chapter 7: Emergent Subject Positions). As well as post-liberal, post-stable, and post-anthropocentric we should also be post-progression, post-linearity, and perhaps even post-good citizens. This denotes an approach that is aligned with a posthuman ethic, as it requires not only a breakdown of the boundaries between self and other, but also a breakdown between success and failure, or good and bad, in ways that force a more (posthumanly) empathetic understanding of our actions as entwined. This negates the role of judgement and discrimination, with both human and non-human others, and moves towards societies that are more equal, embracing their entanglements and emergence.

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Appendix 1: Empathy at Play (draft version)

Empathy at play: Embodying posthuman subjectivities in gaming.

Abstract

In this paper, we address the need for a posthuman account in the relationship between the avatar and player. We draw on a particular line of thought in posthumanist theory that suggests a constantly permeable, fluid and extended subjectivity, which blurs the boundaries between human and non-human. In doing so, we propose a posthuman concept of empathy in gameplay, and we apply this concept to data from the first author's 18-month ethnographic fieldnotes of gameplay in the MMORPG *World of Warcraft*. Exploring this data through our analytic of posthuman empathy, we demonstrate the interdependence of the avatar-player relationship. We show how empathy allows us to understand this relationship as constantly negotiated, producing visceral reactions in the interconnected avatar-player subject, as well as moments of co-produced in-game action that require 'affective matching' between subjective and embodied experiences. We argue that this account of the avatar-player relationship extends research in game culture, by providing a horizontal, non-hierarchical discussion of its most necessary interaction.

Keywords

Posthuman subjectivity, posthuman empathy, World of Warcraft, avatar-player relationships, MMORPG, embodiment, digital culture, empathy, posthuman.

Appendix 2: The Empathic Gamer (draft version)

The Empathic Gamer

Poppy Wilde

Abstract

In theatre empathy could be considered between two sets of people. There is an empathic relationship between the actor and the character and also between the audience and the characters. The actor must empathise with the character in order to deliver their experiences and emotions in the most believable way possible. This corresponds to the meaning of empathy as 'entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. […] It means temporarily living in his/her life'[i] and this is precisely the job of the actor who 'passes from the plane of actual reality into the plane of another life'.[ii]

For the audience empathising with the character involves experiencing '*vicariously* what the characters in the action seem to be feeling'[iii], deriving pleasure from the spectacle before them. Therefore the main differential between the empathy of the actor and the empathy of the audience would appear to be the embodiment and enactment of the role through the actor's performance.

In many ways, gaming can be considered similar to theatre. Steve Dixon discusses the correspondences between the two, including aspects of time, narrative, characters and emotional responses.[iv] In this paper I explore these emotional responses further, and consider the shared quality of the empathic connection with character. For the gamer the divide between audience and actor is conflated; they become both vessel and viewer. I will therefore seek to explore the empathic connection between gamer and character in relation to the actor/character and audience/characters in theatre, and discuss the ways in which this manifests itself in the lived experience of MMORPG gaming. I will consider responses to narrative in gameplay as well as embodied, affective responses to the experience of the avatar.

Key Words: Empathy, gaming, MMORPG, theatre, acting, embodiment, affect, lived experience.

*****

Appendix 3: Ethics Documentation

Low Risk Research Ethics Approval

Project Title

I, Posthuman: Embodying Entangled Subjectivities in Gaming

Record of Approval

Principal Investigator

I **request an ethics peer review** and confirm that I have answered all relevant questions in this checklist honestly.	X
I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described in this checklist. I will immediately suspend research and request new ethical approval if the project subsequently changes the information I have given in this checklist.	X
I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agreed to abide by the Code of Research Ethics issued by the relevant national learned society.	X
I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agreed to abide by the University's Research Ethics, Governance and Integrity Framework.	X

Name: Poppy Wilde ..... Date: 30/03/2017 .....

Student's Supervisor (if applicable)

I have read this checklist and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the student and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.

Name: Adrienne Evans .....

Date: 02/06/2017 .....

Reviewer (if applicable)

Date of approval by anonymous reviewer: 02/06/2017

Low Risk Research Ethics Approval Checklist

Project Information

Project Ref	P52835
Full name	Poppy Wilde
Faculty	Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Department	Computing and Media
Supervisor	Adrienne Evans
Module Code	
EFAAF Number	
Project title	I, Posthuman: Embodying Entangled Subjectivities in Gaming
Date(s)	16/09/2013 - 25/09/2017
Created	30/03/2017 12:34

Project Summary

My PhD project explores the lived experience of posthuman subjectivity using autoethnographic data collected during game play in the massively multiplayer online role playing game World of Warcraft. Through my autoethnographic reflections, I document the emotional, affective, embodied, empathic and performative aspects which are at play in the relationship between avatar and gamer. As Braidotti suggests, 'the relationship between the human and the technological other has shifted in the contemporary context, to reach unprecedented degrees of intimacy and intrusion' (2013: 89), and in my research I argue that the gamer is one embodied example of this.

Names of Co-Investigators and their organisational affiliation (place of study/employer)	
Is the project self-funded?	YES
Who is funding the project?	Coventry University CSAD PhD Studentship
Has the funding been confirmed?	YES
Are you required to use a Professional Code of Ethical Practice appropriate to your discipline?	NO
Have you read the Code?	NO

Project Details

What is the purpose of the project?	The research illustrates one way that posthuman subjectivity occurs as an entangled and fluid embodiment between human and machine. In this regard the research hopes to use theory to help us make sense of the everyday and "mundane" practice of gaming. It will therefore identify an example of a posthuman subjectivity, demonstrating the everyday application of theory through its use in a popular way of engaging with the media. Furthermore the research will consider the ways in which being "posthuman" feels very "human" thus articulating a space in between the utopian and dystopian versions of posthumanism by arguing that this posthuman subjectivity is as complex a subjectivity as any other that we embody.
What are the planned or desired outcomes?	This research project hopes to find new ways of understanding subjectivity by using traditionally "humanist" concepts and "posthumanising" them to make sense of a permeable version of subjectivity. Through using the context of the MMORPG I will identify an example of posthuman subjectivity, demonstrating the application of theory in an "everyday" situation thereby making theory useful and relevant to people through demonstrating its use in a popular way of engaging with the media. It will explore the relationship between the body and the screen/machine in creating that new subjectivity, demonstrating how being posthuman feels very human. In this way the research hopes to articulate a space in between the utopian and dystopian versions of posthumanism, as it is as complex a subjectivity as any other we embody.
Explain your research design	My research will be a using the post-positivist research paradigm, which is concerned with generating theories,

	usually using small qualitative data samples which are rich and subjective (Wisker 2008: 68). The post-positivist research paradigm, which I will be using, works on the assumption that you the researcher believe the world to be 'indefinable, interpreted, shifting in meaning based on who, when and why anyone carries out and adds the meaning' (Wisker 2009: 66). In this research paradigm and for my own research project the focus is on understanding the relationship between avatar and gamer to explore posthuman subjectivity, which is more usefully understood through interpretation of qualitative data to attempt to 'understand meanings, interpretations and/or to look at, describe and understand experience, ideas, beliefs and values – intangibles such as these' (Wisker 2008: 74-75). As a consequence of this I will aim for depth over breadth in my data sample in order to facilitate in-depth understanding of the experience of the phenomena being studied (Ruane 2005: 12). I will be using autoethnography as my method with its own methodological constructs.
Outline the principal methods you will use	My chosen method is autoethnography. I use the self to study lived experience as I suggest that it has strong potential for allowing subjective insight into the research project and question and because I believe it is the most accurate way to explore the medium of gaming experientially. It is my belief that by using my own experiences and writing about those I am able to do my best to ensure that the writing portrays an account of the experience that resonates in some way and limits the distortion of interpretation. A first-person method, or an autoethnography, might be preferential as '[m]y own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's are' (van Manen 1990: 54). I have "immersed" myself in the MMORPG World

	of Warcraft and taken extensive field notes which I have then analysed thematically.	
Are you proposing to use an external research instrument, validated scale or follow a published research method?		NO
If yes, please give details of what you are using		
Will your research involve consulting individuals who support, or literature, websites or similar material which advocates, any of the following: terrorism, armed struggles, or political, religious or other forms of activism considered illegal under UK law?		NO
Are you dealing with Secondary Data? (e.g. sourcing info from websites, historical documents)		YES
Are you dealing with Primary Data involving people? (e.g. interviews, questionnaires, observations)		NO
Are you dealing with personal or sensitive data?		NO
Is the project solely desk based? (e.g. involving no laboratory, workshop or off-campus work or other activities which pose significant risks to researchers or participants)		NO
Are there any other ethical issues or risks of harm raised by the study that have not been covered by previous questions?		NO
If yes, please give further details		

External Ethical Review

Question		Yes	No
1	Will this study be submitted for ethical review to an external organisation? (e.g. Another University, Social Care, National Health Service, Ministry of Defence, Police Service and Probation Office)		X
	If YES, name of external organisation		
2	Will this study be reviewed using the IRAS system?		X
3	Has this study previously been reviewed by an external organisation?		X

Risk of harm, potential harm and disclosure of harm

Question			Yes	No
1	Is there any significant risk that the study may lead to physical harm to participants or researchers?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
2	Is there any significant risk that the study may lead to psychological or emotional distress to participants?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
3	Is there any risk that the study may lead to psychological or emotional distress to researchers?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
4	Is there any risk that your study may lead or result in harm to the reputation of participants, researchers, or their employees, or any associated persons or organisations?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
5	Is there a risk that the study will lead to participants to disclose evidence of previous criminal offences, or their intention to commit criminal offences?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
6	Is there a risk that the study will lead participants to disclose evidence that children or vulnerable adults are being harmed, or at risk or harm?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
7	Is there a risk that the study will lead participants to disclose evidence of serious risk of other types of harm?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
8	Are you aware of the CU Disclosure protocol?		X	

Online and Internet Research

Question				Yes	No
1	Will any part of your study involve collecting data by means of electronic media (e.g. the Internet, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, online forums, etc)?			X	
	If YES, please explain how you will obtain permission to collect data by this means		My dataset is my own personal field notes from my own immersion in the MMORPG World of Warcraft and as such will only contain observations about the game or my interaction with it, therefore no permission is required		
2	Is there a possibility that the study will encourage children under 18 to access inappropriate websites, or correspond with people who pose risk of harm?				X
	If YES, please explain further				
3	Will the study incur any other risks that arise specifically from the use of electronic media?				X
	If YES, please explain further				
4	Will you be using survey collection software (e.g. BoS, Filemaker)?				X
	If YES, please explain which software				
5	Have you taken necessary precautions for secure data management, in accordance with data protection and CU Policy?			X	
	If NO	please explain why not			
	If YES	Specify location where data will be stored	Personal computer in a password protected folder and cloud backup with encryption and password protected.		
		Planned disposal date	25/09/2020		
		If the research is funded by an external organisation, are there any requirements for storage and disposal?			X
		If YES, please specify details			

Laboratory/Workshops

Question			Yes	No
1	Does any part of the project involve work in a laboratory or workshop which could pose risks to you, researchers or others?			X
	If YES: If you have risk assessments for laboratory or workshop activities you can refer to them here & upload them at the end, or explain in the text box how you will manage those risks			

Research with non-human vertebrates

Question			Yes	No
1	Will any part of the project involve animal habitats or tissues or non-human vertebrates?			X
	If YES, please give details			
2	Does the project involve any procedure to the protected animal whilst it is still alive?			
3	Will any part of your project involve the study of animals in their natural habitat?			
	If YES, please give details			
4	Will the project involve the recording of behaviour of animals in a non-natural setting that is outside the control of the researcher?			
	If YES, please give details			
5	Will your field work involve any direct intervention other than recording the behaviour of the animals available for observation?			
	If YES, please give details			
6	Is the species you plan to research endangered, locally rare or part of a sensitive ecosystem protected by legislation?			
	If YES, please give details			
7	Is there any significant possibility that the welfare of the target species of those sharing the local environment/habitat will be detrimentally affected?			
	If YES, please give details			
8	Is there any significant possibility that the habitat of the animals will be damaged by the project, such that their health and survival will be endangered?			
	If YES, please give details			
9	Will project work involve intervention work in a non-natural setting in relation to invertebrate species other than Octopus vulgaris?			
	If YES, please give details			

Blood Sampling / Human Tissue Analysis

Question			Yes	No
1	Does your study involve collecting or use of human tissues or fluids? (e.g. collecting urine, saliva, blood or use of cell lines, 'dead' blood)			X
	If YES, please give details			
2	If your study involves blood samples or body fluids (e.g. urine, saliva) have you clearly stated in your application that appropriate guidelines are to be followed (e.g. The British Association of Sport and Exercise Science Physiological Testing Guidelines (2007) or equivalent) and that they are in line with the level of risk?			
	If NO, please explain why not			
3	If your study involves human tissue other than blood and saliva, have you clearly stated in your application that appropriate guidelines are to be followed (e.g. The Human Tissues Act, or equivalent) and that they are in line with level of risk?			
	If NO, please explain why not			

Travel

Question			Yes	No
1	Does any part of the project require data collection off campus? (e.g. work in the field or community)			X
	If YES: You must consider the potential hazards from off campus activities (e.g. working alone, time of data collection, unfamiliar or hazardous locations, using equipment, the terrain, violence or aggression from others). Outline the precautions that will be taken to manage these risks, AS A MINIMUM this must detail how researchers would summon assistance in an emergency when working off campus. For complex or high risk projects you may wish to complete and upload a separate risk assessment			
2	Does any part of the project involve the researcher travelling outside the UK (or to very remote UK locations)?			
	If YES: Please give details of where, when and how you will be travelling. For travel to high risk places you may wish to complete and upload a separate risk assessment			
3	Are all travellers aware of contact numbers for emergency assitance when away (e.g. local emergency assistance, ambulance/local hospital/police, insurance helpline [+44 (0) 2071 737797] and CU's 24/7 emergency line [+44 (0) 2476 888555])?			
4	Are there any travel warnings in place advising against all, or essential only travel to the destination? NOTE: Before travel to countries with 'against all travel', or 'essential only' travel warnings, staff must check with Finance to ensure insurance coverage is not affected. Undergraduate projects in high risk destinations will not be approved			
5	Are there increased risks to health and safety related to the destination? e.g. cultural differences, civil unrest, climate, crime, health outbreaks/concerns, and travel arrangements?			
	If YES, please specify			
6	Do all travelling members of the research team have adequate travel insurance?			
7	Please confirm all travelling researchers have been advised to seek medical advice regarding vaccinations, medical conditions etc, from their GP			